

The Complete Plays
of
D. H. LAWRENCE



HILLMANN LONDON

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enough (HOLROYD stands looking at her) Go, I mean it, go out again And if you never come back again, I'm glad I've had enough (She keeps her face averted, will not look at him, her attitude expressing thorough weariness)

HOLROYD All right then !

He hobbles, in unlaced boots, to the door Then he turns to look at her She turns herself still farther away, so that her back is towards him He goes

CURTAIN

ACT II

The scene is the same, two hours later The cottage is in darkness, save for the firelight On the table is spread a newspaper A cup and saucer, a plate, a piece of bacon in the frying tin are on the newspaper ready for the miner's breakfast MRS HOLROYD has gone to bed There is a noise of heavy stumbling down the three steps outside

BLACKMORE'S VOICE Steady, now, steady It's all in darkness
Missis!—Has she gone to bed?

He tries the latch—shakes the door

HOLROYD'S VOICE (*He is drunk*) Her's locked me out Let me smash that bloody door in Come out—come out—ussza! (*He strikes a heavy blow on the door There is a scuffle*)

BLACKMORE'S VOICE Hold on a bit—what're you doing?

HOLROYD'S VOICE I'm smashing that blasted door in

MRS HOLROYD (*appearing and suddenly drawing the bolts, flinging the door open*) What do you think you're doing?

HOLROYD (*lurching into the room, snarling*) What? What? Tha thought tha'd play thy monkey tricks on me, did ter? (*Shouting*) But I'm going to show thee (*He lurches at her threateningly, she recoils*)

BLACKMORE (*seizing him by the arm*) Here, here—! Come and sit down and be quiet

HOLROYD (*snarling at him*) What?—What? An' what's thaigh got ter do wi' it (*Shouting*) What's thaigh got ter do wi' it?

BLACKMORE Nothing—nothing, but it's getting late, and you want your supper

HOLROYD (*shouting*) I want nowt I'm allowed nowt in this 'ouse (*Shouting louder*) 'Er begrudges me ivry morsel I ha'e

MRS HOLROYD Oh, what a story!

HOLROYD (*shouting*) It's the truth, an' you know it

BLACKMORE (*conciliatory*) You'll rouse the children You'll rouse

HOLROYD (*suddenly quiet*) Not me—not if I know it I shan't disturb 'em—bless 'em

He staggers to his arm-chair and sits heavily

BLACKMORE Shall I light the lamp?

MRS HOLROYD No, don't trouble Don't stay any longer, there's no need

BLACKMORE (*quietly*) I'll just see it's alright

He proceeds in silence to light the lamp HOLROYD is seen dropping forward in his chair He has a cut on his cheek MRS HOLROYD is in an old-fashioned dressing-gown BLACKMORE has an overcoat buttoned up to his chin There is a very large lump of coal on the red fire

MRS HOLROYD Don't stay any longer

BLACKMORE I'll see it's alright

MRS HOLROYD I shall be all right He'll go to sleep now

BLACKMORE But he can't go like that

MRS HOLROYD What has he done to his face?

BLACKMORE He had a row with Jim Goodwin

MRS HOLROYD What about?

BLACKMORE I don't know

MRS HOLROYD The beast!

BLACKMORE By Jove, and isn't he a weight! He's getting fat, must be——

MRS HOLROYD He's big made—he has a big frame

BLACKMORE Whatever he is, it took me all my time to get him home I thought I'd better keep an eye on him I knew you'd be worrying So I sat in the smoke-room and waited for him Though it's a dirty hole—and dull as hell

MRS HOLROYD Why did you bother?

BLACKMORE Well, I thought you'd be upset about him I had to drink three whiskies—had to, in all conscience—(*smiling*)

MRS HOLROYD I don't want to be the ruin of you

BLACKMORE (*smiling*) Don't you? I thought he'd pitch forward on to the lines and crack his skull

HOLROYD has been sinking farther and farther forward in drunken sleep He suddenly jerks too far and is awakened He sits upright, glaring fiercely and dazedly at the two, who instantly cease talking

HOLROYD (*to BLACKMORE*) What are thaigh doin' 'ere?

BLACKMORE Why, I came along with you

HOLROYD Thou'rt a liar, I'm only just come in

MRS HOLROYD (*coldly*) He is no liar at all He brought you home because you were too drunk to come yourself

HOLROYD (*starting up*) Thou'rt a liar! I niver set eyes on him this night, afore now

MRS HOLROYD (*with a "Pf" of contempt*) You don't know what you *have* done to-night

HOLROYD (*shouting*) I s'll not ha'e it, I tell thee

MRS HOLROYD Psh!

HOLROYD I s'll not ha'e it I s'll ha'e no carryin's on i' my 'ouse——

MRS HOLROYD (*shrugging her shoulders*) Talk when you've got some sense

HOLROYD (*fiercely*) I've as much sense as thaigh Am I a fool? Canna I see? What's *he* doin' here then, answer me that What——?

MRS HOLROYD Mr Blackmore came to bring you home because you were *too drunk* to find your own way And this is the thanks he gets

HOLROYD (*contemptuously*) Blackymore, Blackymore It's him tha cuts thy cloth by, is it?

MRS HOLROYD (*hotly*) You don't know what you're talking about, so keep your tongue still

HOLROYD (*bitingly*) I don't know what I'm talking about—I don't know what I'm talking about—don't I? An' what about him standing there then, if I don't know what I'm talking about?—What?

BLACKMORE You've been to sleep, Charlie, an' forgotten I came in with you, not long since

HOLROYD I'm not daft, I'm not a fool I've got eyes in my head and sense You needn't try to get over me I know what you're up to

BLACKMORE (*flushing*) It's a bit off to talk to me like that, Charlie, I must say

HOLROYD I'm not good enough for 'er She wants Mr Blackymore He's a gentleman, he is Now we have it all, now we understand

MRS HOLROYD I wish you understood enough to keep your tongue still

HOLROYD What? What? I'm to keep my tongue still, am I? An' what about Mr Blackmore?

MRS HOLROYD (*fiercely*) Stop your mouth, you—you vulgar, low-minded brute

HOLROYD Am I? Am I? An' what are you? What tricks are you up to, an' all? But that's alright—that's alright (*Shouting*) That's alright, if it's you

BLACKMORE I think I'd better go You seem to enjoy—er—er—calumniating your wife

HOLROYD (*mockingly*) Calamniating—calamniating—I'll give you calamniating, you mealy-mouthed jockey I'll give you calamniating

BLACKMORE I think you've said about enough

HOLROYD 'Ave I, 'ave I? Yer flimsy jack—'ave I? (*In a sudden burst*) But I've not done wi' thee yet?

BLACKMORE (*ironically*) No, and you haven't

HOLROYD (*shouting—pulling himself up from the arm-chair*) I'll show thee—I'll show thee

BLACKMORE *laughs*

HOLROYD Yes!—yes, my young monkey It's thaigh, is it?

BLACKMORE Yes, it's *me*

HOLROYD (*shouting*) An' I'll ma'e thee wish it worn't, I will What—? What? Tha'd come slivin' round here, would ta? (*He lurches forward at BLACKMORE with clenched fist*)

MRS HOLROYD Drunken, drunken fool—oh, don't

HOLROYD (*turning to her*) What?

She puts up her hands before her face BLACKMORE *seizes the upraised arm and swings HOLROYD round*

BLACKMORE (*in a towering passion*) Mind what tha'rt doing!

HOLROYD (*turning fiercely on him—incoherent*) Wha'—wha'——!

He aims a heavy blow BLACKMORE *evades it, so that he is struck on the side of the chest Suddenly he shows his teeth* *He raises his fists ready to strike* HOLROYD *when the latter stands to advantage*

MRS HOLROYD (*rushing upon BLACKMORE*) No, no! Oh, no!

She flies and opens the door, and goes out BLACKMORE *glances after her, then at HOLROYD, who is preparing, like a bull, for another charge* *The young man's face lights up*

HOLROYD Wha'—wha' !

*As he advances, BLACKMORE quickly retreats out-of-doors
HOLROYD plunges upon him BLACKMORE slips behind the door-
jamb, puts out his foot, and trips HOLROYD with a crash upon
the brick yard*

MRS HOLROYD Oh, what has he done to himself?

BLACKMORE (*thickly*) Tumbled over himself

*HOLROYD is seen struggling to rise, and is heard incoherently
cursing*

MRS HOLROYD Aren't you going to get him up?

BLACKMORE What for?

MRS HOLROYD But what shall we do?

BLACKMORE Let him go to hell

*HOLROYD, who has subsided, begins to snarl and struggle
again*

MRS HOLROYD (*in terror*) He's getting up

BLACKMORE Alright, let him

*MRS HOLROYD looks at BLACKMORE, suddenly afraid of him
also*

HOLROYD (*in a last frenzy*) I'll show thee—I'll——

He raises himself up, and is just picking his balance when

*BLACKMORE, with a sudden light kick, sends him sprawling
again He is seen on the edge of the light to collapse into stupor*

MRS HOLROYD He'll kill you, he'll kill you!

BLACKMORE laughs short

MRS HOLROYD Would you believe it! Oh, isn't it awful! (*She
begins to weep in a little hysteria, BLACKMORE stands with his
back leaning on the doorway, grinning in a strained fashion*) Is
he hurt, do you think?

BLACKMORE I don't know—I should think not

MRS HOLROYD I wish he was dead, I do, with all my heart

BLACKMORE Do you? (*He looks at her quickly, she wavers and
shrinks, he begins to smile strainedly as before*) You don't know
what you wish, or what you want

MRS HOLROYD (*troubled*) Do you think I could get past him to
come inside?

BLACKMORE I should think so

*MRS HOLROYD, silent and troubled, manœuvres in the door-
way, stepping over her husband's feet, which lie on the thresh-
hold*

BLACKMORE Why, you've got no shoes and stockings on!

MRS HOLROYD No (*She enters the house and stands trembling before the fire*)

BLACKMORE (*following her*) Are you cold?

MRS HOLROYD A little—with standing on the yard

BLACKMORE What a shame!

She, uncertain of herself, sits down He drops on one knee, awkwardly, and takes her feet in his hands

MRS HOLROYD Don't—no, don't!

BLACKMORE They are frightfully cold (*He remains, with head sunk, for some moments, then slowly rises*) Damn him!

They look at each other, then, at the same time, turn away

MRS HOLROYD We can't leave him lying there

BLACKMORE No—no! I'll bring him in

MRS HOLROYD But——!

BLACKMORE He won't wake again The drink will have got hold of him by now (*He hesitates*) Could you take hold of his feet—he's so heavy

MRS HOLROYD Yes

They go out and are seen stooping over

BLACKMORE Wait, wait, till I've got him—half a minute

MRS HOLROYD backs in first They carry HOLROYD in and lay him on the sofa

MRS HOLROYD Doesn't he look awful?

BLACKMORE It's more mark than mar It isn't much, really

He is busy taking off HOLROYD's collar and tie, unfastening the waistcoat, the braces and the waist buttons of the trousers, he then proceeds to unlace the drunken man's boots

MRS HOLROYD (*who has been watching closely*) I shall never get him upstairs

BLACKMORE He can sleep here, with a rug or something to cover him You don't want him—upstairs?

MRS HOLROYD Never again

BLACKMORE (*after a moment or two of silence*) He'll be alright down here Have you got a rug?

MRS HOLROYD Yes

She goes upstairs BLACKMORE goes into the scullery, returning with a ladling can and towel He gets hot water from the boiler Then, kneeling down, he begins to wipe the drunken

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man's face lightly with the flannel, to remove the blood and dirt

MRS HOLROYD (*returning*) What are you doing?

BLACKMORE Only wiping his face to get the dirt out

MRS HOLROYD I wonder if he'd do as much for you

BLACKMORE I hope not

MRS HOLROYD Isn't he horrible, horrible——

BLACKMORE (*looks up at her*) Don't look at him then

MRS HOLROYD I can't take it in, it's too much

BLACKMORE He won't wake I will stay with you

MRS HOLROYD (*earnestly*) No—oh, no

BLACKMORE There will be the drawn sword between us (*He indicates the figure of HOLROYD, which lies, in effect, as a barrier between them*)

MRS HOLROYD (*blushing*) Don't!

BLACKMORE I'm sorry

MRS HOLROYD (*after watching him for a few moments lightly wiping the sleeping man's face with a towel*) I wonder you can be so careful over him

BLACKMORE (*quietly*) It's only because he's helpless

MRS HOLROYD But why should you love him ever so little?

BLACKMORE I don't—only he's helpless Five minutes since I could have killed him

MRS HOLROYD Well, I don't understand you men

BLACKMORE Why?

MRS HOLROYD I don't know

BLACKMORE I thought as I stood in that doorway, and he was trying to get up—I wished as hard as I've ever wished anything in my life——

MRS HOLROYD What?

BLACKMORE That I'd killed him I've never wished anything so much in my life—if wishes were anything

MRS HOLROYD Don't, it *does* sound awful

BLACKMORE I *could* have done it, too He ought to be dead

MRS HOLROYD (*pleading*) No, don't! You know you don't mean it, and you make me feel so awful

BLACKMORE I do mean it It is simply true, what I say

MRS HOLROYD But don't say it

BLACKMORE No?

MRS HOLROYD No, we've had enough

BLACKMORE Give me the rug

She hands it him, and he tucks HOLROYD *up*

MRS HOLROYD You only do it to play on my feelings

BLACKMORE (*laughing shortly*) And now give me a pillow—thanks

There is a pause—both look at the sleeping man

BLACKMORE I suppose you're fond of him, really

MRS HOLROYD No more

BLACKMORE You were fond of him?

MRS HOLROYD I was—yes

BLACKMORE What did you like in him?

MRS HOLROYD (*uneasily*) I don't know

BLACKMORE I suppose you really care about him, even now?

MRS HOLROYD Why are you so sure of it?

BLACKMORE Because I think it is so

MRS HOLROYD I did care for him—now he has destroyed it——

BLACKMORE I don't believe he can destroy it

MRS HOLROYD (*with a short laugh*) Don't you? When you are married you try You'll find it isn't so hard

BLACKMORE But what did you like in him—because he was good-looking, and strong, and that?

MRS HOLROYD I liked that as well But if a man makes a nuisance of himself, his good looks are ugly to you, and his strength loathsome Do you think I *care* about a man because he's got big fists, when he is a coward in his real self?

BLACKMORE Is he a coward?

MRS HOLROYD He *is*—a pettifogging, paltry one

BLACKMORE And so you've really done with him?

MRS HOLROYD I have

BLACKMORE And what are you going to do?

MRS HOLROYD I don't know

BLACKMORE I suppose nothing You'll just go on—even if you've done with him—you'll go on with him

There is a long pause

BLACKMORE But was there nothing else in him but his muscles and his good looks to attract you to him?

MRS HOLROYD Why? What does it matter?

BLACKMORE What did you *think* he was?

MRS HOLROYD Why must we talk about him?

BLACKMORE Because I can never quite believe you

MRS HOLROYD I can't help whether you believe it or not

BLACKMORE Are you just in a rage with him, because of to-night?

MRS HOLROYD I know, to-night finished it But it was never right between us

BLACKMORE Never?

MRS HOLROYD Not once And then to-night—no, it's too much, I can't stand any more of it

BLACKMORE I suppose he got tipsy Then he said he wasn't a married man—vowed he wasn't, to those paper bonnets They found out he was, and said he was frightened of his wife getting to know Then he said they should all go to supper at his house—I suppose they came out of mischief

MRS HOLROYD He did it to insult me

BLACKMORE Oh, he was a bit tight—you can't say it was deliberate

MRS HOLROYD No, but it shows how he feels toward me The feeling comes out in drink

BLACKMORE How does he feel toward you?

MRS HOLROYD He wants to insult me, and humiliate me, in every moment of his life Now I simply despise him

BLACKMORE You really don't care any more about him?

MRS HOLROYD No

BLACKMORE (*hesitates*) And you would leave him?

MRS HOLROYD I would leave him, and not care *that* about him any more (*She snaps her fingers*)

BLACKMORE Will you come with me?

MRS HOLROYD (*after a reluctant pause*) Where?

BLACKMORE To Spain I can any time have a job there, in a decent part You could take the children

The figure of the sleeper stirs uneasily—they watch him

BLACKMORE Will you?

MRS HOLROYD When would you go?

BLACKMORE To-morrow, if you like

MRS HOLROYD But why do you want to saddle yourself with me and the children?

BLACKMORE Because I want to

MRS HOLROYD But you don't love me?

BLACKMORE Why don't I?

MRS HOLROYD You don't

BLACKMORE I don't know about that I don't know anything about love Only I've gone on for a year, now, and it's got stronger and stronger——

MRS HOLROYD What has?

BLACKMORE This—this wanting you, to live with me I took no notice of it for a long time Now I can't get away from it, at no hour and nohow (*He still avoids direct contact with her*)

MRS HOLROYD But you'd like to get away from it

BLACKMORE I hate a mess of any sort But if you'll come away with me—you and the children——

MRS HOLROYD But I couldn't—you don't love me——

BLACKMORE I don't know what you mean by I don't love you

MRS HOLROYD I can feel it

BLACKMORE And do you love me? (*A pause*)

MRS HOLROYD I don't know Everything is so—so——

There is a long pause

BLACKMORE How old are you?

MRS HOLROYD Thirty-two

BLACKMORE I'm twenty-seven

MRS HOLROYD And have you never been in love?

BLACKMORE I don't think so I don't know

MRS HOLROYD But you must know I must go and shut that door that keeps clicking

She rises to go upstairs, making a clatter at the stairfoot door The noise rouses her husband As she goes upstairs, he moves, makes coughing sounds, turns over, and then suddenly sits upright, gazing at BLACKMORE The latter sits perfectly still on the sofa, his head dropped, hiding his face His hands are clasped They remain thus for a minute

HOLROYD Hello! (*He stares fixedly*) Hello! (*His tone is undecided, as if he mistrusts himself*) What are—who are ter? (*BLACKMORE does not move, HOLROYD stares blankly, he then turns and looks at the room*) Well, I dunna know

He staggers to his feet, clinging to the table, and goes groping to the stairs They creak loudly under his weight A door-latch is heard to click In a moment MRS HOLROYD comes quickly downstairs

BLACKMORE Has he gone to bed?

MRS HOLROYD (*nodding*) Lying on the bed

BLACKMORE Will he settle now?

MRS HOLROYD I don't know He is like that sometimes He will have delirium tremens if he goes on

BLACKMORE (*softly*) You can't stay with him, you know

MRS HOLROYD And the children?

BLACKMORE We'll take them

MRS HOLROYD Oh!

Her face puckers to cry Suddenly he starts up and puts his arms round her, holding her protectively and gently, very caressingly She clings to him They are silent for some moments

BLACKMORE (*struggling, in an altered voice*) Look at me and kiss me

Her sobs are heard distinctly BLACKMORE lays his hand on her cheek, caressing her always with his hand

BLACKMORE My God, but I hate him! I wish either he was dead or me (*MRS HOLROYD hides against him, her sobs cease, after a while he continues in the same murmuring fashion*) It can't go on like it any more I feel as if I should come in two I can't keep away from you I simply can't Come with me Come with me and leave him If you knew what a hell it is for me to have you here—and to see him I can't go without you, I can't It's been hell every moment for six months now You say I don't love you Perhaps I don't, for all I know about it But oh, my God, don't keep me like it any longer Why should *he* have you—and I've never had anything

MRS HOLROYD Have you never loved anybody?

BLACKMORE No—I've tried Kiss me of your own wish—will you?

MRS HOLROYD I don't know

BLACKMORE (*after a pause*) Let's break clear Let's go right away Do you care for me?

MRS HOLROYD I don't know (*She loosens herself, rises dumbly*)

BLACKMORE When do you think you will know?

She sits down helplessly

MRS HOLROYD I don't know

BLACKMORE Yes, you do know, really If he was dead, should you marry me?

MRS HOLROYD Don't say it—

BLACKMORE Why not? If wishing of mine would kill him, he'd soon be out of the way

MRS HOLROYD But the children!

BLACKMORE I'm fond of them I shall have good money

MRS HOLROYD But he's their father

BLACKMORE What does that mean——?

MRS HOLROYD Yes, I know—(*a pause*) but——

BLACKMORE Is it *him* that keeps you?

MRS HOLROYD No

BLACKMORE Then come with me Will you? (*He stands waiting for her, then he turns and takes his overcoat, pulls it on, leaving the collar turned up, ceasing to twist his cap*) Well—will you tell me to-morrow?

She goes forward and flings her arms round his neck. He suddenly kisses her passionately

MRS HOLROYD But I ought not (*She draws away a little, he will not let her go*)

BLACKMORE Yes, it's alright (*He holds her close*)

MRS HOLROYD Is it?

BLACKMORE Yes, it is It's alright

He kisses her again. She releases herself but holds his hand. They keep listening

MRS HOLROYD Do you love me?

BLACKMORE What do you ask for?

MRS HOLROYD Have I hurt you these months?

BLACKMORE You haven't And I don't care what it's been if you'll come with me (*There is a noise upstairs and they wait*) You will soon, won't you?

She kisses him

MRS HOLROYD He's not safe (*She disengages herself and sits on the sofa*)

BLACKMORE (*takes a place beside her, holding her hand in both his*)

You should have waited for me

MRS HOLROYD How wait?

BLACKMORE And not have married him

MRS HOLROYD I might never have known you—I married him to get out of my place

BLACKMORE Why?

MRS HOLROYD I was left an orphan when I was six My Uncle

John brought me up, in the Coach and Horses at Rainsworth He'd got no children He was good to me, but he drank I went to Mansfield Grammar School Then he fell out with me because I wouldn't wait in the bar, and I went as nursery governess to Berryman's And I felt I'd nowhere to go, I belonged to nowhere, and nobody cared about me, and men came after me, and I hated it So to get out of it, I married the first man that turned up

BLACKMORE And you never cared about him?

MRS HOLROYD Yes, I did I did care about him I wanted to be a wife to him But there's nothing at the bottom of him, if you know what I mean You can't *get* anywhere with him There's just his body and nothing else Nothing that keeps him, no anchor, no roots, nothing satisfying It's a horrible feeling there is about him, that nothing is safe or permanent—nothing is anything—

BLACKMORE And do you think you can trust *me*?

MRS HOLROYD I think you're different from him

BLACKMORE Perhaps I'm not

MRS HOLROYD (*warmly*) You are

BLACKMORE At any rate, we'll see You'll come on Saturday to London?

MRS HOLROYD Well, you see, there's my money I haven't got it yet My uncle has left me about a hundred and twenty pounds

BLACKMORE Well, see the lawyer about it as soon as you can I can let you have some money if you want any But don't let us wait after Saturday

MRS HOLROYD But isn't it wrong?

BLACKMORE Why, if you don't care for him, and the children are miserable between the two of you—which they are—

MRS HOLROYD Yes

BLACKMORE Well, then I see no wrong As for him—he would go one way, and only one way, whatever you do Damn him, he doesn't matter

MRS HOLROYD No

BLACKMORE Well, then—have done with it Can't you cut clean of him? Can't you now?

MRS HOLROYD And then—the children—

BLACKMORE They'll be alright with me and you—won't they?

MRS HOLROYD Yes—

BLACKMORE Well, then Now, come and have done with it We

can't keep on being ripped in two like this We need never hear of him any more

MRS HOLROYD Yes—I love you I do love you——

BLACKMORE Oh, my God! (*He speaks with difficulty—embracing her*)

MRS HOLROYD When I look at him, and then at you—ha—(*She gives a short laugh*)

BLACKMORE He's had all the chance—it's only fair—Lizzie——

MRS HOLROYD My love

There is silence He keeps his arm round her After hesitating, he picks up his cap

BLACKMORE I'll go then—at any rate Shall you come with me?

She follows him to the door

MRS HOLROYD I'll come on Saturday

BLACKMORE Not now?

CURTAIN

ACT III

Scene, the same Time, the following evening, about seven o'clock
The table is half-laid, with a large cup and saucer, plate, etc.,
ready for HOLROYD'S dinner, which, like all miners, he has
when he comes home between four and five o'clock On the
other half of the table MRS HOLROYD is ironing On the hearth
stand newly baked loaves of bread The irons hang at the fire
JACK, with a bowler hat hanging at the back of his head,
parades up to the sofa, on which stands MINNIE engaged in
dusting a picture She has a soiled white apron tied behind her,
to make a long skirt

JACK Good mornin', missis Any scissors or knives to grind?
MINNIE (*peering down from the sofa*) Oh, I can't be bothered to
come downstairs Call another day

JACK I shan't

MINNIE (*keeping up her part*) Well, I can't come down now (JACK
stands irresolute) Go on, you have to go and steal the baby

JACK I'm not

MINNIE Well, you can steal the eggs out of the fowl-house

JACK I'm not

MINNIE Then I shan't play with you

JACK takes off his bowler hat and flings it on the sofa, tears
come in MINNIE'S eyes

Now I'm not friends (She surveys him ruefully, after a few
moments of silence she clammers down and goes to her
mother) Mam, he won't play with me

MRS HOLROYD (*crossly*) Why don't you play with her? If you
begin bothering, you must go to bed

JACK Well, I don't want to play

MRS HOLROYD Then you must go to bed

JACK I don't want to

MRS HOLROYD Then what do you want, I should like to know?

MINNIE I wish my father'd come

JACK I do

MRS HOLROYD I suppose he thinks he's paying me out This is the third time this week he's slunk past the door and gone down to Old Brinsley instead of coming in to his dinner He'll be as drunk as a lord when he does come

The children look at her plaintively

MINNIE Isn't he a nuisance?

JACK I hate him I wish he'd drop down th' pit-shaft

MRS HOLROYD Jack!—I never heard such a thing in my life! You mustn't say such things—it's wicked

JACK Well, I do

MRS HOLROYD (*loudly*) I won't have it He's your father, remember

JACK (*in a high voice*) Well, he's always comin' home an' shoutin' an' bangin' on the table (*He is getting tearful and defiant*)

MRS HOLROYD Well, you mustn't take any notice of him

MINNIE (*wistfully*) 'Appen if you said something nice to him, mother, he'd happen go to bed, and not shout

JACK I'd hit him in the mouth

MRS HOLROYD Perhaps we'll go to another country, away from him—should we?

JACK In a ship, mother?

MINNIE In a ship, mam?

MRS HOLROYD Yes, in a big ship, where it's blue sky, and water and palm-trees, and——

MINNIE An' dates——?

JACK When should we go?

MRS HOLROYD Some day

MINNIE But who'd work for us? Who should we have for father?

JACK You don't want a father I can go to work for us

MRS HOLROYD I've got a lot of money now, that your uncle left me

MINNIE (*after a general thoughtful silence*) An' would my father stop here?

MRS HOLROYD Oh, he'd be alright

MINNIE But who would he live with?

MRS HOLROYD I don't know—one of his paper bonnets, if he likes

MINNIE Then she could have her old bracelet back, couldn't she?

MRS HOLROYD Yes—there it is on the candlestick, waiting for her

In several cases alternative drafts of the plays in this volume exist in manuscript form, but the versions here printed are regarded as being the most complete

The date in brackets under the title of each play indicates the year of completion of the text

*There is a sound of footsteps—then a knock at the door
The children start*

MINNIE (*in relief*) Here he is

MRS HOLROYD *goes to the door* BLACKMORE *enters*

BLACKMORE It is foggy to-night— Hello, aren't you youngsters gone to bed?

MINNIE No, my father's not come home yet

BLACKMORE (*turning to* MRS HOLROYD) Did he go to work then, after last night?

MRS HOLROYD I suppose so His pit things were gone when I got up I never thought he'd go

BLACKMORE And he took his snap as usual?

MRS HOLROYD Yes, just as usual I suppose he's gone to the New Inn He'd say to himself he'd pay me out That's what he always does say, "I'll pay thee out for that bit—I'll ma'e thee regret it"

JACK We're going to leave him

BLACKMORE So you think he's at the New Inn?

MRS HOLROYD I'm sure he is—and he'll come when he's full He'll have a bout now, you'll see

MINNIE Go and fetch him, Mr Blackmore

JACK My mother says we shall go in a ship and leave him

BLACKMORE (*after looking keenly at* JACK *to* MRS HOLROYD) Shall I go and see if he's at the New Inn?

MRS HOLROYD No—perhaps you'd better not—

BLACKMORE Oh, he shan't see me I can easily manage that

JACK Fetch him, Mr Blackmore

BLACKMORE Alright, Jack (*To* MRS HOLROYD) Shall I?

MRS HOLROYD We're always pulling on you— But yes, do!

BLACKMORE *goes out*

JACK I wonder how long he'll be

MRS HOLROYD You come and go to bed now you'd better be out of the way when he comes in

MINNIE And you won't say anything to him, mother, will you?

MRS HOLROYD What do you mean?

MINNIE You won't begin of him—row him

MRS HOLROYD Is he to have all his own way? What *would* he be like, if I didn't row him?

JACK But it doesn't matter, mother, if we're going to leave him—

MINNIE But Mr Blackmore'll come back won't he, mam and dad won't shout before him?

MRS HOLROYD (*beginning to undress the children*) Yes, he'll come back

MINNIE Mam—could I have that bracelet to go to bed with?

MRS HOLROYD Come and say your prayers

They kneel, muttering in their mother's apron

MINNIE (*suddenly lifting her head*) Can I mam?

MRS HOLROYD (*trying to be stern*) Have you finished your prayers?

MINNIE Yes

MRS HOLROYD If you want it—beastly thing! (*She reaches the bracelet down from the mantelpiece*) Your father must have put it up there—I don't know where I left it I suppose he'd think I was proud of it and wanted it for an ornament

MINNIE *gloats over it* MRS HOLROYD *lights a candle and they go upstairs After a few moments the outer door opens, and there enters an old woman She is of middling stature and wears a large grey shawl over her head After glancing sharply round the room, she advances to the fire, warms herself, then, taking off her shawl, sits in the rocking-chair As she hears MRS HOLROYD's footsteps, she folds her hands and puts on a lachrymose expression, turning down the corners of her mouth and arching her eyebrows*

MRS HOLROYD Hello, mother, is it you?

GRANDMOTHER Yes, it's me Haven't you finished ironing?

MRS HOLROYD Not yet

GRANDMOTHER You'll have your irons red-hot

MRS HOLROYD Yes, I s'll have to stand them to cool (*She does so, and moves about at her ironing*)

GRANDMOTHER And you don't know what's become of Charles?

MRS HOLROYD Well, he's not come home from work yet I supposed he was at the New Inn— Why?

GRANDMOTHER That young electrician come knocking asking if I knew where he was "Eh," I said, "I've not set eyes on him for over a week—nor his wife neither, though they pass th' garden gate every time they go out I know nowt on 'im " I axed him what was the matter, so he said Mrs Holroyd was anxious because he'd not come home, so I thought I'd better come and see Is there anything up?

MRS HOLROYD No more than I've told you

GRANDMOTHER It's a rum 'un, if he's neither in the New Inn nor the Prince o' Wales I suppose something you've done's set him off

MRS HOLROYD It's nothing I've done

GRANDMOTHER Eh, if he's gone off and left you, whatever shall we do! Whatever 'ave you been doing?

MRS HOLROYD He brought a couple of bright daisies here last night—two of those trollops from Nottingham—and I said I'd not have it

GRANDMOTHER (*sighing deeply*) Ay, you've never been able to agree

MRS HOLROYD We agreed well enough except when he drank like a fish and came home rolling

GRANDMOTHER (*whining*) Well, what can you expect of a man as 'as been shut up i' th' pit all day? He must have a bit of relaxation

MRS HOLROYD He can have it different from that, then At any rate, I'm sick of it

GRANDMOTHER Ay, you've a stiff neck, but it'll be bowed by you're my age

MRS HOLROYD Will it? I'd rather it were broke

GRANDMOTHER Well—there's no telling what a jealous man will do (*She shakes her head*)

MRS HOLROYD Nay, I think it's my place to be jealous, when he brings a brazen hussy here and sits carryin' on with her

GRANDMOTHER He'd no business to do that But you know, Lizzie, he's got something on *his* side

MRS HOLROYD What, pray?

GRANDMOTHER Well, I don't want to make any mischief, but you're my son's wife, an' it's nothing but my duty to tell you They've been saying a long time now as that young electrician is here a bit too often

MRS HOLROYD He doesn't come for my asking

GRANDMOTHER No, I don't suppose he wants for asking But Charlie's not the man to put up with that sort o' work

MRS HOLROYD Charlie put up with it! If he's anything to say, why doesn't he say it, without going to other folks?

GRANDMOTHER Charlie's never been near me with a word—nor 'as

he said a word elsewhere to my knowledge For all that, this is going to end with trouble

MRS HOLROYD In this hole, every gossiping creature thinks she's got the right to cackle about you—sickening! And a parcel of lies

GRANDMOTHER Well, Lizzie, I've never said anything against you Charlie's been a handful of trouble He made my heart ache once or twice afore you had him, and he's made it ache many, many's the time since But it's not all on his side, you know

MRS HOLROYD (*hotly*) No, I don't know

GRANDMOTHER You thought yourself above him, Lizzie, an' you know he's not the man to stand it

MRS HOLROYD No, he's run away from it

GRANDMOTHER (*venomously*) And what man wouldn't leave a woman that allowed him to live on sufferance in the house with her, when he was bringing the money home?

MRS HOLROYD "Sufferance!"—Yes, there's been a lot of letting him live on "sufferance" in the house with me It is *I* who have lived on sufferance, for his service and pleasure No, what he wanted was the drink and the public house company, and because he couldn't get them here, he went out for them That's all

GRANDMOTHER You have always been very clever at hitting things off, Lizzie I was always sorry my youngest son married a clever woman He only wanted a bit of coaxing and managing, and you clever women won't do it

MRS HOLROYD He wanted a slave, not a wife

GRANDMOTHER It's a pity your stomach wasn't too high for him, before you had him But no, you could have eaten him ravishing at one time

MRS HOLROYD It's a pity you didn't tell me what he was before I had him But no, he was all angel You left me to find out what he really was

GRANDMOTHER Some women could have lived with him happy enough An' a fat lot you'd have thanked me for my telling

There is a knock at the door MRS HOLROYD opens

RIGLEY They tell me, missus, as your mester's not hoom yet

MRS HOLROYD No—who is it?

GRANDMOTHER Ask him to step inside Don't stan' there lettun' the fog in

RIGLEY *steps in* He is a tall, bony, very oughly hewn collier

RIGLEY Good evenin'

GRANDMOTHER Oh, is it you, Mr Rigley? (*In a querulous, spiteful tone to MRS HOLROYD*) He butties along with Charlie

MRS HOLROYD Oh!

RIGLEY Au' han yer seen nowt on 'im?

MRS HOLROYD No—was he all right at work?

RIGLEY Well, e' wor nowt to mention A bit short, like 'adna much to say I canna ma'e out what 'e's done wi' 'issen (*He is manifestly uneasy, does not look at the two women*)

GRANDMOTHER An' did 'e come up i' th' same bantle wi' you?

RIGLEY No—'e didna As Ah was comin' out o' th' stall, Ah shouted, "Art comin', Charlie? We're a' off " An' 'e said, "Ah'm comin' in a minute " 'E wor just finishin' a stint, like, an' 'e wanted ter get it set An' 'e 'd been a bit roughish in 'is temper, like, so I thowt 'e didna want ter walk to th' bottom wi' us

GRANDMOTHER (*wailing*) An' what's 'e gone an' done to himself?

RIGLEY Nay, missis, yo munna ax me that 'E's non done owt as Ah know on On'y I wor thinkin', 'appen summat 'ad 'appened to 'im, like, seen' as nob'dy had any knowings of 'im comin' up

MRS HOLROYD What is the matter, Mr Rigley? Tell us it out

RIGLEY I canna do that, missis It seems as if 'e niver come up th' pit—as far as we can make out 'Appen a bit o' stuff's fell an' pinned 'im

GRANDMOTHER (*wailing*) An' 'ave you left 'im lying down there in the pit, poor thing?

RIGLEY (*uneasily*) I couldna say for certain where 'e is

MRS HOLROYD (*agitated*) Oh, it's very likely not very bad, mother! Don't let us run to meet trouble

RIGLEY We 'ave to 'ope for th' best, missis, all on us

GRANDMOTHER (*wailing*) Eh, they'll bring 'im 'ome, I know they will, smashed up an' broke! An' one of my sons they've burned down pit till the flesh dropped off 'im, an' one was shot till 'is shoulder was all of a mosh, an' they brought 'em 'ome to me An' now there's this

MRS HOLROYD (*shuddering*) Oh, don't, mother (*Appealing to RIGLEY*) You don't know that he's hurt?

RIGLEY (*shaking his head*) I canna tell you

MRS HOLROYD (*in a high hysterical voice*) Then what is it?

RIGLEY (*very uneasy*) I canna tell you But yon young electrician—Mr Blackmore—'e rung down to the night deputy, an' it seems as though there's been a fall or summat

GRANDMOTHER Eh, Lizzie, you parted from him in anger You little knowed how you'd meet him again

RIGLEY (*making an effort*) Well, I'd 'appen best be goin' to see what's betide

He goes out

GRANDMOTHER I'm sure I've had my share of bad luck, I have I'm sure I've brought up five lads in the pit, through accidents and troubles, and now there's this The Lord has treated me very hard, very hard It's a blessing, Lizzie, as you've got a bit of money, else what would 'ave become of the children?

MRS HOLROYD Well, if he's badly hurt, there'll be the Union-pay, and sick-pay—we shall manage And perhaps it's *not* very much

GRANDMOTHER There's no knowin' but what they'll be carryin' him to die 'i th' hospital

MRS HOLROYD Oh, don't say so, mother—it won't be so bad, you'll see

GRANDMOTHER How much money have you, Lizzie, comin'?

MRS HOLROYD I don't know—not much over a hundred pounds

GRANDMOTHER (*shaking her head*) An' what's that, what's that?

MRS HOLROYD (*sharply*) Hush!

GRANDMOTHER (*crying*) Why, what?

MRS HOLROYD *opens the door In the silence can be heard the pulsing of the fan engine, then the driving engine chuffs rapidly there is a skirr of brakes on the rope as it descends*

MRS HOLROYD That's twice they've sent the chair down—I wish we could see Hark!

GRANDMOTHER What is it?

MRS HOLROYD Yes—it's stopped at the gate It's the doctor's

GRANDMOTHER (*coming to the door*) What, Lizzie?

MRS HOLROYD The doctor's motor (*She listens acutely*) Dare you stop here, mother, while I run up to the top an' see?

GRANDMOTHER You'd better not go, Lizzie, you'd better not A woman's best away

MRS HOLROYD It is unbearable to wait

GRANDMOTHER Come in an' shut the door—it's a cold that gets in your bones

MRS HOLROYD *goes in*

MRS HOLROYD Perhaps while he's in bed we shall have time to change him It's an ill wind brings no good He'll happen be a better man

GRANDMOTHER Well, you can but try Many a woman's thought the same

MRS HOLROYD Oh, dear, I wish somebody would come He's never been hurt since we were married

GRANDMOTHER No, he's never had a bad accident, all the years he's been in the pit He's been luckier than most But everybody has it, sooner or later

MRS HOLROYD (*shivering*) It is a horrid night

GRANDMOTHER (*querulous*) Yes, come your ways in

MRS HOLROYD Hark!

There is a quick sound of footsteps BLACKMORE comes into the light of the doorway

BLACKMORE They're bringing him

MRS HOLROYD (*quickly putting her hand over her breast*) What is it?

BLACKMORE You can't tell anything's the matter with him—it's not marked him at all

MRS HOLROYD Oh, what a blessing! And is it much?

BLACKMORE Well——

MRS HOLROYD What is it?

BLACKMORE It's the worst

GRANDMOTHER Who is it?—What does he say?

MRS HOLROYD sinks on the nearest chair with a horrified expression BLACKMORE pulls himself together and enters the room He is very pale

BLACKMORE I came to tell you they're bringing him home

GRANDMOTHER And you said it wasn't very bad, did you?

BLACKMORE No—I said it was—as bad as it could be

MRS HOLROYD (*rising and crossing to her MOTHER-IN-LAW, flings her arms round her, in a high voice*) Oh, mother, what shall we do? What shall we do?

GRANDMOTHER You don't mean to say he's dead?

BLACKMORE Yes

GRANDMOTHER (*staring*) God help us, and how was it?

BLACKMORE Some stuff fell

GRANDMOTHER (*locking herself and her daughter-in-law—both weeping*) Oh, God have mercy on us! Oh, God have mercy on us! Some stuff fell on him An' he'd not even time to cry for mercy, oh, God spare him! Oh, what shall we do for comfort? To be taken straight out of his sins Oh, Lizzie, to think he should be cut off in his wickedness! He's been a bad lad of late, he has, poor lamb He's gone very wrong of late years, poor dear lamb, very wrong Oh, Lizzie, think what's to become of him now! If only you'd have tried to be different with him

MRS HOLROYD (*moaning*) Don't, mother, don't I can't bear it

BLACKMORE (*cold and clear*) Where will you have him laid? The men will be here in a moment

MRS HOLROYD (*starting up*) They can carry him up to bed—

BLACKMORE It's no good taking him upstairs You'll have to wash him and lay him out

MRS HOLROYD (*startled*) Well—

BLACKMORE He's in his pit-dirt

GRANDMOTHER He is, bless him We'd better have him down here, Lizzie, where we can handle him

MRS HOLROYD Yes

She begins to put the tea things away, but drops the sugar out of the basin and the lumps fly broadcast

BLACKMORE Never mind, I'll pick those up You put the children's clothes away

MRS HOLROYD stares witless around The GRANDMOTHER sits rocking herself and weeping BLACKMORE clears the table, putting the pots in the scullery He folds the white tablecloth and pulls back the table The door opens MRS HOLROYD utters a cry RIGLEY enters

RIGLEY They're bringing him now, missis

MRS HOLROYD Oh!

RIGLEY (*simply*) There must ha' been a fall directly after we left him

MRS HOLROYD (*frowning, horrified*) No—no!

RIGLEY (*to BLACKMORE*) It fell a' back of him, an' shut 'im in as you might shut a loaf 'i th' oven It never touched him

MRS HOLROYD (*staring distractedly*) Well, then—

RIGLEY You see, it come on 'im as close as a trap on a mouse, an'

gen him no air, an' what wi' th' gas, it smothered him An' it wouldna be so very long about it neither

MRS HOLROYD (*quiet with horror*) Oh!

GRANDMOTHER Eh, dear—dear Eh, dear—dear

RIGLEY (*looking hard at her*) I wasna to know what 'ud happen

GRANDMOTHER (*not heeding him, but weeping all the time*) But the

Lord gave him time to repent He'd have a few minutes to repent

Ay, I hope he did, I hope he did, else what was to become of him

The Lord cut him off in his sins, but He gave him time to repent

RIGLEY *looks away at the wall* BLACKMORE *has made a space in the middle of the floor*

BLACKMORE If you'll take the rocking-chair off the end of the rug,

Mrs Holroyd, I can pull it back a bit from the fire, and we can lay him on that

GRANDMOTHER (*petulantly*) What's the good of messing about—
(*She moves*)

MRS HOLROYD It suffocated him?

RIGLEY (*shaking his head, briefly*) Yes 'Appened th' after-damp—

BLACKMORE He'd be dead in a few minutes

MRS HOLROYD No—oh, think!

BLACKMORE You mustn't think

RIGLEY (*suddenly*) They commin'!

MRS HOLROYD *stands at bay* The GRANDMOTHER *half rises*
RIGLEY and BLACKMORE *efface themselves as much as possible*
A man *backs into the room, bearing the feet of the dead man, which are shod in great pit boots* As the head bearer comes awkwardly past the table, the coat with which the body is covered slips off, revealing HOLROYD in his pit-dirt, naked to the waist

MANAGER (*a little stout, white-bearded man*) Mind now, mind Ay, missis, what a job, indeed, it is! (*Sharply*) Where mun they put him?

MRS HOLROYD (*turning her face aside from the corpse*) Lay him on the rug

MANAGER Steady now, do it steady

SECOND BEARER (*rising and pressing back his shoulders*) By Guy, but 'e 'ings heavy

MANAGER Yi, Joe, I'll back my life o' that

ACT IV

Ten minutes later WESSON is smoking Enter BARBARA, dressed, with her hat on

BARBARA Here I am, then !

WESSON Are you going straight to Gardone, to the Monte Baldo ?

BARBARA No—I'm going to the Hotel Cervo

WESSON But you can't—she knows us, the landlady—and thinks we're man and wife You can't make that mess If you're going, go straight to Frederick to-night—I'll see you there

BARBARA I'm *not* going to Frederick to-night—I'm not going to Gardone—I'm going to the Hotel Cervo

WESSON How much money have you got ?

BARBARA None

WESSON Then I won't give you any

BARBARA Don't you trouble—I wouldn't take any of your money

WESSON Have you got your night-things in the handbag ?

BARBARA Yes

WESSON Some soap—some hankies ?

BARBARA No—forgotten 'em

WESSON You would

Exit—comes running back in a moment, puts the things in her bag

BARBARA Thank you

WESSON And your box I'll pack to-morrow The things you said were mine I shall put in

BARBARA You needn't

WESSON I shall I've never given you anything, so you've nothing to return

BARBARA No—you were always stingy

WESSON Very well—Frederick isn't

BARBARA I suppose it's having been brought up so poor, you can't help it

WESSON We won't discuss me now, nor my bringing-up

BARBARA Oh, alright !

GRANDMOTHER Eh, Mr Chambers, what's this affliction on my old age You kept your sons out o' the pit, but all mine's in And to think of the trouble I've had—to think o' the trouble that's come out of Brinsley pit to me

MANAGER It has that, it 'as that, missis You seem to have had more'n your share, I'll admit it, you have

MRS HOLROYD (*who has been staring at the men*) It is too much'

BLACKMORE *frowns, RIGLEY glowers at her*

MANAGER You never knowed such a thing in your life Here's a man, holin' a stunt, just finishin', (*He puts himself as if in the holer's position, gesticulating freely*) an' a lot o' stuff falls behind him, clean as a whistle, shuts him up safe as a worm in a nut and niver touches him—niver knowed such a thing in your life

MRS HOLROYD Ugh'

MANAGER It niver hurt him—niver touched him

MRS HOLROYD Yes, but—but how long would he *be* (*She makes a sweeping gesture, the MANAGER looks at her and will not help her out*)—how long would it take—ah—to—to kill him'

MANAGER Nay, I canna tell ye 'E didna seem to ha' strived much to get out—did he, Joe'

SECOND BEARER No, not as far as Ah'n seen

FIRST BEARER You look at 'is 'ands, you'll see then 'E'd non ha'e room to swing the pick

The MANAGER goes on his knees

MRS HOLROYD (*shuddering*) Oh, don't'

MANAGER Ay, th' nails is broken a bit——

MRS HOLROYD (*clenching her fists*) Don't'

MANAGER 'E'd be sure ter ma'e a bit of a fight But th' gas 'ud soon get hold on 'im Ay, it's an awful thing to think of, it is indeed

MRS HOLROYD (*her voice breaking*) I can't bear it'

MANAGER Eh, dear, we none on us know what's comin' next

MRS HOLROYD (*getting hysterical*) Oh, it's too awful, it's too awful'

BLACKMORE You'll disturb the children

GRANDMOTHER And you don't want *them* down here

MANAGER 'E'd no business to ha' been left, you know

RIGLEY An' what man, dost think, wor goin' to sit him down on his hams an' wait for a chap as wouldna say "thank yer" for his cump'ny' 'E'd bin ready to fall out wi' a flicker o' the candle, so

The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

(1914)

to stop over Sunday But you'll have to be in again by half-past nine on Sunday night, and if you're late, you'll have your next week-end knocked off And there you'll be—and you'll be quite happy They'll give you plenty to eat, and a can of beer a day, and a bit of bacca—and they'll provide dominoes and skittles for you to play with And you'll be the most contented set of men alive—But you won't be men You won't even be animals You'll go from number one to number three thousand, a lot of numbered slaves—a new sort of slaves

VOICE An' wheer shall thee be, Willie?

WILLIE Oh, I shall be outside the palings, laughing at you I shall have to laugh, because it'll be your own faults You'll have nobody but yourself to thank for it You don't *want* to be men You'd rather *not* be free—much rather You're like those people spoken of in Shakespeare "Oh, how eager these men are to be slaves!" I believe it's Shakespeare—or the Bible—one or the other—it mostly is——

ANABEL WRATH (*passing to church*) It was Tiberius

WILLIE Eh?

ANABEL Tiberius said it

WILLIE Tiberius!—Oh, did he? (*Laughs*) Thanks! Well, if Tiberius said it, there must be something in it And he only just missed being in the Bible, anyway He was a day late, or they'd have had him in "Oh, how eager these men are to be slaves!"—It's evident the Romans deserved all they got from Tiberius—and you'll deserve all you get, every bit of it But don't you bother, you'll get it You won't be at the mercy of Tiberius, you'll be at the mercy of something a jolly sight worse Tiberius took the skin off a few Romans, apparently But you'll have the soul taken out of you—every one of you And I'd rather lose my skin than my soul, any day But perhaps you wouldn't

VOICE What art makin' for, Willie? Tha seems to say a lot, but tha goes round it Tha'rt like a donkey on a gin Tha gets ravelled

WILLIE Yes, that's just it I am precisely like a donkey on a gin—a donkey that's trying to wind a lot of colliers up to the surface There's many a donkey that's brought more colliers than you up to see daylight, by trotting round—But do you want to know what I'm making for? I can soon tell you that You Barlow and Walsall's men, you haven't a soul to call your own Barlow and

who dost think wor goin' ter stop when we knowed 'e on'y kep on so's to get shut on us

MANAGER Tha't quite right, Bill, quite right But theer you are

RIGLEY Ah' if we'd stopped, what good would it ha' done——

MANAGER No, 'appen not, 'appen not

RIGLEY For, not known——

MANAGER I'm sayin' nowt agen thee, neither one road nor t'other
(*There is general silence—then, to MRS HOLROYD*) I should think
th' inquest'll be at th' New Inn to-morrow, missis I'll let you
know

MRS HOLROYD Will there have to be an inquest?

MANAGER Yes—there'll have to be an inquest Shall you want any-
body in, to stop with you to-night?

MRS HOLROYD No

MANAGER Well, then, we'd best be goin' I'll send my missis down
first thing in the morning It's a bad job, a bad job, it is You'll
be a' right then?

MRS HOLROYD Yes

MANAGER Well, good night then—good night all

ALL Good night Good night

*The MANAGER, followed by the two bearers, goes out, closing
the door*

RIGLEY It's like this, missis I never should ha' gone, if he hadn't
wanted us to

MRS HOLROYD Yes, I know

RIGLEY 'E wanted to come up by 's sen

MRS HOLROYD (*wearily*) I know how it was, Mr Rigley

RIGLEY Yes——

BLACKMORE Nobody could foresee

RIGLEY (*shaking his head*) No If there's owt, missis, as you
want——

MRS HOLROYD Yes—I think there isn't anything

RIGLEY (*after a moment*) Well—good night—we've worked i' the
same stall ower four years now——

MRS HOLROYD Yes

RIGLEY Well, good night, missis

MRS HOLROYD AND BLACKMORE Good night

*The GRANDMOTHER all this time has been rocking herself to
and fro, moaning and murmuring beside the dead man When*

OLIVER She's a nice child

ANABEL A very nice child

OLIVER Why did you come back, Anabel?

ANABEL Why does the moon rise, Oliver?

OLIVER For some mischief or other, so they say

ANABEL You think I came back for mischief's sake?

OLIVER Did you?

ANABEL No

OLIVER Ah!

ANABEL Tell me, Oliver, how is everything now?—how is it with you?—how is it between us all?

OLIVER How is it between us all?—How *isn't* it, is more the mark

ANABEL Why?

OLIVER You made a fool of us

ANABEL Of whom?

OLIVER Well—of Gerald particularly—and of me

ANABEL How did I make a fool of you, Oliver?

OLIVER That you know best, Anabel

ANABEL No, I don't know Was it ever right between Gerald and me, all the three years we knew each other—we were together?

OLIVER Was it all wrong?

ANABEL No, not all But it was terrible It was terrible, Oliver You don't realize You don't realize how awful passion can be, when it never resolves, when it never becomes anything else It is hate, really

OLIVER What did you want the passion to resolve into?

ANABEL I was blinded—maddened Gerald stung me and stung me till I was mad I left him for reason's sake, for sanity's sake We should have killed one another

OLIVER You stung him too, you know—and pretty badly, at the last you dehumanized him

ANABEL When? When I left him, you mean?

OLIVER Yes, when you went away with that Norwegian—playing your game a little too far

ANABEL Yes, I knew you'd blame me I knew you'd be against me But don't you see, Oliver, you helped to make it impossible for us

OLIVER Did I? I didn't intend to

ANABEL Ha, ha, Oliver! Your good intentions! They are too good

RIGLEY *has gone* MRS HOLROYD *stands staring distractedly before her* *She has not yet looked at her husband*

GRANDMOTHER Have you got the things ready, Lizzie?

MRS HOLROYD What things?

GRANDMOTHER To lay the child out

MRS HOLROYD (*she shudders*) No—what?

GRANDMOTHER Haven't you put him by a pair o' white stockings, nor a white shirt?

MRS HOLROYD He's got a white cricketing shirt—but not white stockings

GRANDMOTHER Then he'll have to have his father's Let me look at the shirt, Lizzie (MRS HOLROYD *takes one from the dresser drawer*) This'll never do—a cold, canvas thing wi' a turndown collar I s'll 'ave to fetch his father's. (*Suddenly*) You don't want no other woman to touch him, to wash him and lay him out, do you?

MRS HOLROYD (*weeping*) No

GRANDMOTHER Then I'll fetch him his father's gear We mustn't let him set, he'll be that heavy, bless him (*She takes her shawl*) I shan't be more than a few minutes, an' the young fellow can stop here till I come back

BLACKMORE Can't I go for you, Mrs Holroyd?

GRANDMOTHER No You couldn't find the things We'll wash him as soon as I get back, Lizzie

MRS HOLROYD Alright

She watches her mother-in-law go out Then she starts, goes in the scullery for a bowl, in which she pours warm water She takes a flannel and soap and towel She stands, afraid to go any further

BLACKMORE Well!

MRS HOLROYD This is a judgment on us

BLACKMORE Why?

MRS HOLROYD On me, it is——

BLACKMORE How?

MRS HOLROYD It is

BLACKMORE *shakes his head*

MRS HOLROYD Yesterday you talked of murdering him

BLACKMORE Well!

MRS HOLROYD Now we've done it

MR BARLOW I am afraid, Anabel, you will have a great deal to excuse in us, in the way of manners. We have never been a formal household. But you have lived in the world of artists; you will understand, I hope.

ANABEL Oh, surely——

MR BARLOW Yes, I know. We have been a turbulent family, and we have had our share of sorrow, even more, perhaps, than of joys. And sorrow makes one indifferent to the conventionalities of life.

GERALD Excuse me, Father, do you mind if I go and write a letter I have on my conscience?

MR BARLOW No, my boy. (*Exit GERALD*) We have had our share of sorrow and of conflict, Miss Wrath, as you may have gathered.

ANABEL Yes—a little.

MR BARLOW The mines were opened when my father was a boy—the first—and I was born late, when he was nearly fifty. So that all my life has been involved with coal and colliers. As a young man, I was gay and thoughtless. But I married young, and we lost our first child through a terrible accident. Two children we have lost through sudden and violent death. (*WINIFRED goes out unnoticed*) It made me reflect. And when I came to reflect, Anabel, I could not justify my position in life. If I believed in the teachings of the New Testament—which I did, and do—how could I keep two or three thousand men employed underground in the mines, at a wage, let us say, of two pounds a week, whilst I lived in this comfortable house, and took something like two thousand pounds a year—let us name any figure——

ANABEL Yes, of course. But is it money that really matters, Mr Barlow?

MR BARLOW My dear, if you are a working man, it matters. When I went into the homes of my poor fellows, when they were ill or had had accidents—then I knew it mattered. I knew that the great disparity was wrong—even as we are taught that it is wrong.

ANABEL Yes, I believe that the great disparity is a mistake. But take their lives, Mr Barlow. Do you think they would live more, if they had more money? Do you think the poor live less than the rich?—is their life emptier?

MR BARLOW Surely their lives would be better, Anabel.

GERALD Sort of megalomania, you mean? ^f

MRS BARLOW What? Megalomania! What is your love but a megalomania, flowing over everybody, and everything like spilt water? Megalomania! I hate you, you softy! I would *beat* you (*suddenly advancing on him and beating him fiercely*)—beat you into some manhood—beat you—

GERALD Stop, Mother—keep off

MRS BARLOW It's the men who need beating nowadays, not the children Beat the softness out of him, young woman It's the only way, if you love him enough—if you love him enough

GERALD You hear, Anabel?

*Speak roughly to your little boy,
And beat him when he sneezes*

MRS BARLOW (*catching up a large old fan, and smashing it about his head*) You softy—you piffler—you will never have had enough! Ah, you should be thrust in the fire, you should, to have the softness and the brittleness burnt out of you!

The door opens—OLIVER TURTON enters, followed by JOB ARTHUR FREER MRS BARLOW is still attacking GERALD She turns, infuriated

Go out! Go out! What do you mean by coming in unannounced? Take him upstairs—take that fellow into the library, Oliver Turton

GERALD Mother, you improve our already pretty reputation Already they say you are mad

MRS BARLOW (*ringing violently*) Let me be mad then I am mad—driven mad One day I shall kill you, Gerald

GERALD You won't, Mother, because I shan't let you

MRS BARLOW Let me!—let me! As if I should wait for you to let me!

GERALD I am a match for you even in violence, come to that

MRS BARLOW A match! A damp match A wet match

Enter BUTLER

WILLIAM You rang, madam? *

MRS BARLOW Clear up those bits—Where are you going to see that white-faced fellow? Here?

GERALD I think so

MRS BARLOW You will *still* have them coming to the house, will

BLACKMORE How?

MRS HOLROYD He'd have come up with the others, if he hadn't felt—felt me murdering him

BLACKMORE But we can't help it

MRS HOLROYD It's my fault.

BLACKMORE Don't be like that!

MRS HOLROYD (*looking at him—then indicating her husband*) I daren't see him

BLACKMORE No?

MRS HOLROYD I've killed him, that is all

BLACKMORE No, you haven't

MRS HOLROYD Yes, I have

BLACKMORE We couldn't help it

MRS HOLROYD If he hadn't felt, if he hadn't *known*, he wouldn't have stayed, he'd have come up with the rest

BLACKMORE Well, and even if it was so, we can't help it now

MRS HOLROYD But we've killed him

BLACKMORE Ah, I'm tired——

MRS HOLROYD Yes

BLACKMORE (*after a pause*) Shall I stay?

MRS HOLROYD I—I daren't be alone with him

BLACKMORE (*sitting down*) No

MRS HOLROYD I don't love him Now he's dead I don't love him
He lies like he did yesterday

BLACKMORE I suppose, being dead—I don't know——

MRS HOLROYD I think you'd better go

BLACKMORE (*rising*) Tell me

MRS HOLROYD Yes

BLACKMORE You want me to go

MRS HOLROYD No—but *do go* (*They look at each other*)

BLACKMORE I shall come to-morrow

BLACKMORE *goes out*

MRS HOLROYD *stands very stiff, as if afraid of the dead man
Then she stoops down and begins to sponge his face, talking to him*

MRS HOLROYD My dear, my dear—oh, my dear! I can't bear it, my dear—you shouldn't have done it You shouldn't have done it Oh—I can't bear it, for you Why couldn't I do anything for you? The children's father—my dear—I wasn't good to you But

GERALD Yes

ANABEL Don't you think we've been wrong?

GERALD How?

ANABEL In the way we've lived—and the way we've loved

GERALD It hasn't been heaven, has it? Yet, I don't know that we've been wrong, Anabel We had it to go through

ANABEL Perhaps—And, yes, we've been wrong too

GERALD Probably Only, I don't feel it like that

ANABEL Then I think you ought You ought to feel you've been wrong

GERALD Yes, probably Only, I don't I can't help it I think we've gone the way we had to go, following our own natures

ANABEL And where has it landed us?

GERALD Here

ANABEL And where is that?

GERALD Just on this bench in the park, looking at the evening

ANABEL But what next?

GERALD God knows! Why trouble?

ANABEL One must trouble I want to feel sure

GERALD What of?

ANABEL Of you—and of myself

GERALD Then *be* sure

ANABEL But I can't Think of the past—what it's been

GERALD This isn't the past

ANABEL But what is it? Is there anything sure in it? Is there any real happiness?

GERALD Why not?

ANABEL But how can you ask? Think of what our life has been

GERALD I don't want to

ANABEL No, you don't But what *do* you want?

GERALD I'm alright, you know, sitting here like this

ANABEL But one can't sit here for ever, can one?

GERALD I don't want to

ANABEL And what will you *do* when we leave here?

GERALD God knows! Don't worry me Be still a bit

ANABEL But *I'm* worried You don't love me

GERALD I won't argue it

ANABEL And I'm not happy

you shouldn't have done this to me Oh, dear, oh, dear! Did it hurt you?—oh, my dear, it hurt you—oh, I can't bear it No, things aren't fair—we went wrong, my dear I never loved you enough—I never did What a shame for you! It was a shame But you didn't—you didn't try I *would* have loved you—I tried hard What a shame for you! It was so cruel for you You couldn't help it—my dear, my dear You couldn't help it And I can't do anything for you, and it hurt you so! (*She weeps bitterly, so her tears fall on the dead man's face, suddenly she kisses him*) My dear, my dear, what can I do for you, what can I? (*She weeps as she wipes his face gently*)

Enter GRANDMOTHER

GRANDMOTHER (*putting a bundle on the table, and taking off her shawl*) You're not all by yourself?

MRS HOLROYD Yes

GRANDMOTHER It's a wonder you're not frightened You've not washed his face

MRS HOLROYD Why should I be afraid of him—now, mother?

GRANDMOTHER (*weeping*) Ay, poor lamb, I can't think as ever you could have had reason to be frightened of him, Lizzie

MRS HOLROYD Yes—once——

GRANDMOTHER Oh, but he went wrong An' he was a taking lad, as iver was (*She cries pitifully*) And when I waked his father up and told him, he sat up in bed staring over his whiskers, and said should he come up? But when I'd managed to find the shirt and things, he was still in bed You don't know what it is to live with a man that has no feeling But you've washed him, Lizzie?

MRS HOLROYD I was finishing his head

GRANDMOTHER Let me do it, child

MRS HOLROYD I'll finish that

GRANDMOTHER Poor lamb—poor dear lamb! Yet I wouldn't wish him back, Lizzie He must ha' died peaceful, Lizzie He seems to be smiling He always had such a rare smile on him—not that he's smiled much of late——

MRS HOLROYD I loved him for that

GRANDMOTHER Ay, my poor child—my poor child

MRS HOLROYD He looks nice, mother

GRANDMOTHER I hope he made his peace with the Lord

MRS HOLROYD Yes

GERALD What? What?—By God! I'll kick you out of this park like a rotten bundle if you don't get up and go

ANABEL No, Gerald, no Don't forget yourself It's enough now It's enough now—Come away Do come away Come away—leave him

JOB ARTHUR (*still on the ground*) It's your turn to go It's you as'll go, this time

GERALD (*looking at him*) One can't even tread on you

ANABEL Don't, Gerald, don't—don't look at him—Don't say any more, you, Job Arthur—Come away, Gerald Come away—come—do come

GERALD (*turning*) That a human being! My God!—But he's right—it's I who go It's we who go, Anabel He's still there—My God! a human being!

CURTAIN

SCENE II

Market-place as in Act I WILLIE HOUGHTON, addressing a large crowd of men from the foot of the obelisk

WILLIE And now you're out on strike—now you've been out for a week pretty nearly, what further are you? I heard a great deal of talk about what you were going to do Well, what *are* you going to do? You don't know You've not the smallest idea You haven't any idea whatsoever You've got your leaders Now then, Job Arthur, throw a little light on the way in front, will you for it seems to me we're lost in a bog Which way are we to steer? Come—give the word, and let's gee-up

JOB ARTHUR You ask me which way we are to go I say we can't go our own way, because of the obstacles that lie in front You've got to remove the obstacles from the way

WILLIE So said Balaam's ass But you're not an ass—beg pardon, and you're not Balaam—you're Job And we've all got to be little Jobs, learning how to spell patience backwards We've lost our jobs and we've found a Job It's picking up a scorpion when

GRANDMOTHER If he hadn't time to make his peace with the Lord, I've no hopes of him Dear o' me, dear o' me Is there another bit of flannel anywhere?

MRS HOLROYD *rises and brings a piece* The GRANDMOTHER *begins to wash the breast of the dead man*

GRANDMOTHER Well, I hope you'll be true to his children at least, Lizzie (MRS HOLROYD *weeps—the old woman continues her washing*) Eh—and he's fair as a lily Did you ever see a man with a whiter skin—and flesh as fine as the driven snow He's beautiful, he is, the lamb Many's the time I've looked at him, and I've felt proud of him, I have And now he lies here And such arms on 'im! Look at the vaccination marks, Lizzie When I took him to be vaccinated, he had a little pink bonnet with a feather (*Weeps*) Don't cry, my girl, don't Sit up an' wash him a' that side, or we s'll never have him done Oh, Lizzie!

MRS HOLROYD (*sitting up, startled*) What—what?

GRANDMOTHER Look at his poor hand!

She holds up the right hand The nails are bloody

MRS HOLROYD Oh, no! Oh, no! No!

Both women weep

GRANDMOTHER (*after a while*) We maun get on, Lizzie

MRS HOLROYD (*sitting up*) I can't touch his hands

GRANDMOTHER But I'm his mother—there's nothing I couldn't do for him

MRS HOLROYD I don't care—I don't care

GRANDMOTHER Prithee, prithee, Lizzie, I don't want thee goin' off, Lizzie

MRS HOLROYD (*moaning*) Oh, what shall I do!

GRANDMOTHER Why, go thee an' get his feet washed He's setting stiff, and how shall we get him laid out?

MRS HOLROYD, *sobbing, goes, kneels at the miner's feet, and begins pulling off the great boots*

GRANDMOTHER There's hardly a mark on him Eh, what a man he is! I've had some fine sons, Lizzie, I've had some big men of sons

MRS HOLROYD He was always a lot whiter than me And he used to chaff me

GRANDMOTHER But his poor hands! I used to thank God for my children, but they're rods o' trouble, Lizzie, they are Unfasten

his belt, child We mun get his things off soon, or else we s'll have such a job

MRS HOLROYD, *having dragged off the boots, rises She is weeping*

CURTAIN

VOICE No, because you've got everything

GERALD Where's my coat? Now then, step out of the way

They move towards the car

CURTAIN

NURSE I don't know—about ten and a half stone Will Mr Hemstock lift you, then?

MRS HEMSTOCK I say, Nurse—just look under the bed, atween th' bed slats at th' bottom corner, an' see if tha can see th' will

NURSE (*doubtful*) What! (*She stoops dubiously*)

MRS HEMSTOCK Right hand corner I told the doctor to put it there Canna ter see it?

NURSE Oh, yes, here it is (*She reappears with an envelope*)

MRS HEMSTOCK That's it—it's fastened safe It's a new will, Nurse

I made 'em do it while tha wor away—doctor and Mr Leahy

NURSE Oh, yes—

MRS HEMSTOCK An' I'm not goin' ter ha'e none on 'em gleggin' at it I know our Susy often has a bit of a rummage, but I'm sharper than 'er thinks for

NURSE And what shall I do with it, Mrs Hemstock?

MRS HEMSTOCK Why, get upon th' table, an' look if there isna a hole in top o' the bedpost, at th' head there, where a peg used ter fit in

NURSE (*climbing up*) Yes, there is

MRS HEMSTOCK Then roll it up, an' shove it in On'y leave a scioddy bit out

NURSE That's done it, then

MRS HEMSTOCK Tha'll know where it is, then Tha ought, tha's been more to me than any of my own for these twelve month

NURSE Oh, Mrs Hemstock, I hope—

MRS HEMSTOCK Nay, tha nedna—tha'rt knowin' nowt, I tell thee How much dost reckon I've got, Nurse?

NURSE I don't know, Mrs Hemstock

MRS HEMSTOCK Over five hundred, I can tell thee I made 'em in a little shop as I had in Northrop when the colleries hadna started long—an' I did well—an' so did our Mester—an' so 'as th' lads done—

NURSE It is a good thing, for now they're both out of work they'd have nothing

MRS HEMSTOCK Oh, our HARRY's got a bit of his own, an' our Mester's got about a hundred It'll keep 'em goin' for a bit, wi'out mine

NURSE You *are* queer, Mrs Hemstock

MRS HEMSTOCK Ha, that's what they say about th' Almighty—

David

A PLAY IN SIXTEEN SCENES

(1926)

The old man takes a jar from the cupboard, and puts on his hat At the door he meets the doctor, a clean-shaven fair man rather full at the stomach and low at the chest

DR FOULES Good morning, Mr Hemstock—you are going out?

MR HEMSTOCK For a second, Doctor, just to the shop

DR FOULES I see Then shall I go in?

MR HEMSTOCK Oh, yes, Doctor

DR FOULES Thank you

He enters NURSE *is just putting on her bonnet* The doctor stands confused

NURSE (*low and purring*) Good morning

DR FOULES Nurse Broadbanks!

NURSE (*low*) Yes—just fancy

DR FOULES Well I am surprised Who ever—

NURSE I knew it was you No other doctor would have been so polite about entering the house

DR FOULES Well—I can hardly find words—I am sure—

NURSE Fancy your keeping your old shyness

DR FOULES (*flushing*) I don't know that I do—

NURSE I should have thought it would have worn off—all the experience you have had

DR FOULES Have I had so much experience?

NURSE Eight years

DR FOULES Ah, Nurse, we don't measure experience by years

NURSE Surely, you have a quotation!

DR FOULES (*smiling*) No, I have not—for a wonder Indeed I'm growing out of touch with literature

NURSE I shall not know you You used to be—

DR FOULES *Vox, et præterea nihil* "A voice, and nothing more"

NURSE You are yourself But you have not had much experience, in eight years?

DR FOULES Not much has happened to me

NURSE And you a doctor!

DR FOULES And I a doctor!

NURSE But you have lost your old æsthetic look—wistful, I nearly said

DR FOULES *Damnosa quid non imminuit dies?* "Whom has not pernicious time impaired?"

NURSE Not your stock of learning evidently

overcoat—he is well dressed) We have not struck hands yet
MRS SMALLEY (to RACHEL) What do you say?

RACHEL Nay, I want to hear what you say

MRS SMALLEY I'm going to say nowt, yet a while——

RACHEL Well, we'll see (She pulls her shawl over her head to follow him)

BAKER Nay—I'm going down Northrop—on business

RACHEL Wasn't you coming up?

BAKER To the vicarage? I had this to tell you, that is all

RACHEL Well, I must say—but come up just for——

BAKER Not for a moment, Rachel I am going down Northrop

MRS SMALLEY It's no good you saying nothing, Rachel You might as well save your breath

BAKER (smiling to RACHEL) You hear? I'll see you in the morning
Good night all

Exit BAKER

RACHEL (looking after him) I hate him

MRS SMALLEY I'm going home

She hurries out There is an awkward pause HARRY sits
bending over the fire

RACHEL How is your mother?

HARRY Same

RACHEL Who's with her?

HARRY Dad

RACHEL Where's Patty?

HARRY Cupboard

RACHEL When do you expect Nurse?

HARRY Dunno

RACHEL Have you been drinking whisky? (No answer) Are you going to leave these glasses for Nurse to see? (No answer) Are you going to let her see you drinking? (No answer) Well, I do reckon you might speak to a body I've not spoke to you for a week—hardly seen you I can see you in your garden from the vicarage front bedrooms I often watch you Do you want your glass?

HARRY Gi'e's it here!

RACHEL You might say thank you Job Arthur Bowers wants me to marry him And I shouldn't be surprised if I did (She cries)

HARRY Well, tha nedna scraight

CHARACTERS

DAVID, son of Jesse

SAUL, King of Israel

SAMUEL, Prophet of God

JONATHAN, son of Saul

ABNER, leader of Saul's host

AGAG, King of Amalek

MERAB, daughter of Saul

MICHAL, daughter of Saul

WOMAN-SERVANT

MAIDENS

JESSE, father of David

ELIAB, ABINADAB, SHAMMAH, brothers of David

Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Brothers of David

ADRIEL the Meholathite

Captains, Fighting-Men, Herald, Armour-Bearer, Elders,

Neighbours, Prophets, Herdsmen, and Lad

NURSE I understand—it has been so long

HARRY It has I feel as if I should bust *Tha* has got a nice touch
wi' thee, Nurse 'Appen 'er'll leave me a bit of money——

NURSE Oh, Mr Hemstock'

HARRY An' if I could get some work—dost think I ought to get
married, Nurse?

NURSE Certainly, when you've found the right woman

HARRY If I was in steady work—Nurse, dost think I'm a kid?

NURSE No—why?

HARRY I want motherin', Nurse I feel as if I could scaight I've
been that worked-up this last eight month——

NURSE I know, it has been dreadful for you

HARRY I dunna want huggin' an' kissin', Nurse I want—thar't a
nurse, aren't ter?

NURSE Yes, I'm a nurse

HARRY I s'll reckon I'm badly, an' then tha can nurse me

NURSE You *are* sick——

HARRY I am, Nurse, I'm heartsick of everything

NURSE I know you are——

HARRY An' after my mother's gone—what am I to do?

NURSE What creatures you are, you men You all live by a
woman

HARRY I've lived by my mother What am I to do, Nurse?

NURSE You must get married——

HARRY If I was in steady work——

NURSE You'll get work, I'm sure

HARRY And if my mother leaves me some money——

NURSE I must tell you where the will is, for fear anything should
happen

HARRY Then I can ax—is it done, Nurse?

NURSE Just finished

HARRY Should I lie down?

NURSE Let me straighten the sofa for you, don't get up yet Then
I must see to Mrs Hemstock, and I'll speak to you about the
Baroness's things, and about the will, when I come back How
does the head feel?

HARRY Swimming, like—like a puff o' steam wafflin'

NURSE Come along—come and lie down—there, I'll cover you
up

BARONESS Do not, Baron, do not trouble

BARON Sir, it was not two women—I defy you, sir You make me
a silly thing, it is your spleen

BARONESS^a You had better go, you

HARRY I'm not going to be made a liar of

Enter RACHEL

Rachel, who was it knocked the Baron's hat off an' shook him
last night?

NURSE Do you know the names of those men from Northrop,
Rachel?

RACHEL It wan't him, Baron, he helped you

BARON He would patch me with shame You saw this attack?

RACHEL I was just slipping down to get some milk from Mrs
Smalley, there was none for supper——

BARON And what did you see?

RACHEL I saw some men, an' I heard some shouting, and I saw
somebody hit him on the head Then I ran home, and I'd just
got in when you came

HARRY Why, wan't it you and our Susy as was raggin' the Baron
an' Baroness, an' I come up an' stopped you?

RACHEL Me! Me an' your Susy?

HARRY You shammer!

RACHEL I know you went up an' stopped the men, whoever they
was——

HARRY So I'm a liar? So I'm a liar?

BARONESS Yes—and you may go

HARRY So I'm a liar, Nurse Broadbanks?

He goes out

BARON God help us, we begin to believe in the plots they imagine
against us (*He looks at his hands*) It was not two women,
Baroness?

BARONESS No, Baron, no

BARON You saw several men, Nurse?

NURSE Yes, Baron

BARON Rachel—but why weep! Rachel—he defended me against
men?

RACHEL (*sobbing*) Yes, Baron

BARONESS Rachel, leave the room

RACHEL leaves

In several cases alternative drafts of the plays in this volume exist in manuscript form, but the versions here printed are regarded as being the most complete

The date in brackets under the title of each play indicates the year of completion of the text

SCENE I

Courtyard of Saul's house in Gilgal

SCENE II

A Room in Ramah

SCENE III

An open place in the village of Bethlehem

SCENE IV

A courtyard in Jesse's house

SCENE V

Saul's house in Gilgal

SCENE VI

Yard of Saul's house in Gilgal

SCENE VII

Camp of the Israelites at Elah

SCENE VIII

The King's tent at Elah

SCENE IX

Outside the courtyard of Saul's house in Gilgal

SCENE X

Courtyard of Saul's house in Gilgal

SCENE XI

Room in King's house at Gilgal

SCENE XII

The well at Gilgal

SCENE XIII

A room in David's house in Gilgal

SCENE XIV

the same as for Scene XIII

SCENE XV

Naioth in Ramah

SCENE XVI

A rocky place outside Gilgal

NURSE (*who has been tidying the room*) I will be at your house
in ten minutes

HARRY There's no occasion to hurry—am I to wait for you?

NURSE No, thank you—I would rather come alone

CURTAIN

sleering at me An' I shan't marry Job Arthur, I s'll go in service
in Derby An' you needn't sleer at me no moier—because it's
your fault, even moier than mine

HARRY A' right, ma'e it my fault

RACHEL As much as mine, I said

HARRY Dunna' let me stop thee from ha ein' Job Arthur

RACHEL Job Arthur's a man as can play his own tune on any
mortal woman, brazen as brass, or cuddlin' as a fiddle——

HARRY Or as ronk as an old mouth organ

RACHEL Or like a bagpipe as wants squeeze-in', or a mandolin as
wants tickling He gets a tune out of the whole job lot the whole
band——

HARRY Shut up

RACHEL But I'll buy you a cuckoo-clock to keep you company

HARRY I'll buy my own

RACHEL (*flapping her arms suddenly at him*) Cuckoo! Cuckoo!
Cuckoo!

CURTAIN

SCENE I

Courtyard of SAUL's house in Gilgal sort of compound with an adobe house beyond AGAG, bound, seated on the ground, and fastened by a rope to a post of the shed Men with spears Enter MERAB and MICHAL, daughters of SAUL, with tambourines
MAIDENS

MERAB (*running and dancing*) Saul came home with the spoil of the Amalekite

MAIDENS Hie! Amalekite! Hie! Amalekite!

MICHAL Saul threw his spear into the desert of Shur, through the heart of the Amalekite

MAIDENS Struck the Amalekite, pierced him to the ground

MICHAL Wind of the desert blows between the ribs of Amalek, only the jackal is fat on that land Who smote the Amalekite, as a sand-storm smites the desert?

MAIDENS Saul! Saul! Saul is the slayer and the death of Amalek

MERAB (*before AGAG*) What is this dog with a string round his neck?

MAIDENS What dog is this?

MICHAL I know this dog, men used to call it King!

MAIDENS Look at this King!

MERAB Agag, Agag, King of the Amalekites! Dog on a string at the heel of mighty Saul!

MICHAL (*speaking to AGAG*) Are you the King of the Amalekites?

AGAG I am he, maiden!

MICHAL I thought it was a dog my father had brought home, and tied to a post

MERAB Why are you alone, Agag? Where are all your armed men, that ran like lions, round the road to Egypt? Where are your women, with gold on their foreheads? Let us hear the tinkle of the bracelets of your women, O King, King Agag, King of mighty Amalek!

MAIDENS (*laughing—shaking tambourines in AGAG's face—spitting on him*) Dog! Dog! Dog of an Amalekite!

DR FOULES And I

MR HEMSTOCK And me

HARRY An' me

BARONESS But I'm not so sure—

BARON Enough, enough I am again a disgrace and a laughing
stock You, sir, you Wilcox—

MR WILCOX What, Baron von Ruge?

BARON You—you—you are a scoundrel

BAKER It's old news

BARON I withdraw and refute these double banns next Sunday

MR WILCOX Not with my consent

BARON Do not speak And in the public paper must be refutation

NURSE Oh, isn't it dreadful!

SUSY Folks shouldn't shilly-shally

BARON And then—I have done

DR FOULES Perhaps you can say there was a mistake Substitute
my name for that of Mr Wilcox

BAKER All's fair in love and war Substitute Miss Smalley's name
for Rachel's

RACHEL A change for the better is always welcome Substitute
Harry Hemstock for Job Arthur Bowers

BARON This is madness and insult

DR FOULES It is deadly earnest, Baron Nurse, will you be asked in
church with me next Sunday?

BAKER Susy, will you be asked in church with me next Sunday?

HARRY Rachel, shall you be asked in church with me next Sunday?

BARON Enough, enough! Go away, I will suffer no more of this!

BARONESS Such wicked frivolty! Rachel, go home at once to see
to that pudding

DR FOULES We are most deeply serious, Nurse, are we not?

BAKER Susy, are we not?

HARRY Rachel, are we not?

RACHEL Chorus of ladies, "Yes!"

NURSE AND SUSY Chorus of ladies, "Yes!"

DR FOULES Millicent Broadbanks—Arthur William Foules

BAKER Job Arthur Bowers—Susan Smalley, nee Hemstock, widow

HARRY Rachel Wilcox—Harry Hemstock

BARON Away! Away!

DR FOULES Baron, you should play Duke to our "As You Like It"

MICHAL Who hung on the heels of Israel when they journeyed out of the wilderness of Shur, coming from Egypt, in the days of our fathers, in the day of Moses, our great deliverer?

MAIDENS Ay! Ay! Who threw their spears in the backs of the wandering Israelites?

MICHAL Who killed our women, and the weary ones, and the heavy-footed, in the bitter days of wandering, when we came up out of Egypt?

MERAB Who among our enemies was accursed like the Amalekite? When Moses held the rod of God uplifted in his hand, Joshua smote the Amalekite till the sun went down. But even when the sun was gone, came the voice of the Almighty *War, and war with Amalek, till Amalek is put out from under heaven*

MICHAL Dog! Son of dogs that lay in wait for us as we passed by! Dog! Why has Saul left you eyes to see, and ears to hear!

SAUL (*coming from house*) Agag is among the maidens!

MICHAL See, Father, is *this* a king?

SAUL Even so

MICHAL It is a dog that cannot scratch his own fleas

SAUL Even so, it is a king. King of rich Amalek. Have you seen the presents he has brought for the household of Saul?

MICHAL For the daughters of Saul, Father?

SAUL Surely for Merab and Michal, daughters of Saul (*To a man*) Ho! Bring the basket of spoils for the daughters of the King

MICHAL Listen! Listen! King Agag seeks a wife in Gilgal! Oh, Father, I do not like him! He looks like a crow the dogs have played with. Merab, here is a King for your hand!

MERAB Death is his portion, the Amalekite

MICHAL Will you put him to death, Father? Let us laugh a little longer at his Amalek nose

Enter man with basket—also JONATHAN and ABNER

SAUL See the gifts of Agag, King of Amalek, to the daughters of Saul! Tissue from Egypt, head-veils from Pharaoh's house! And see, red robes from Tyre, and yellow from Sidon

MICHAL (*screams*) That for *me*, Father, that for *me*! Give the other to Merab—Ah! Ah! Ah!—Thank you, King Agag, thank you, King of Amalek

SAUL Goldsmith's work for arms and ankles, gold and dropping silver, for the ears

MICHAL Give me those! Give me those! Give the others to Merab!
Ay! Ay! Maidens! How am I?—See, Agag, noble Agag, how am
I now? Listen! (*She dances, the ornaments clink*) They say
Noble Agag!—King of Givers! Poor draggled crow that had gold
in its nest! Caw! King Agag! Caw! It's a daughter of Saul, of
long-limbed Saul, smiter of Amalek, who tinkles with joys of the
Amalekite

JONATHAN Peace, maiden! Go in and spin wool with the women
You are too much among the men

MICHAL Art thou speaking, O Jonathan, full of thy own manhood?

JONATHAN Take in these spoils from the eye of men, and the light
of day Father, there came one saying that Samuel sought you in
Carmel

SAUL Let him find me in Gilgal

ABNER They are calling even now at the gate (*Moves to gate*)

SAUL (*to girls*) Go to the house and hide your spoil, for if this
prophet of prophets finds the treasure of the Amalekite upon
you, he will tear it away, and curse your youth

MICHAL That he shall not! Oh, Merab, you got the blue shawl
from me! Run! Maidens! Run! Farewell, King Agag, your
servant thanks your lordship!—Caw!—Nay, he cannot even say
caw!

Exit—running—MICHAL, and other MAIDENS follow

ABNER It is so, my lord Samuel even now has passed the stone
of directions, seeking Saul in Gilgal

SAUL It is well He has come to bless our triumph

JONATHAN Father, will you leave that man in the sight of Samuel?

SAUL No! Go you quickly into the house, O Agag! Take him
quickly, men, and let no mouth speak his name

Exeunt AGAG and men

JONATHAN I have a misgiving, Father, that Samuel comes not in
peace, after Saul in Gilgal

SAUL Has Saul laid low the Amalekite, to fear the coming of an
old prophet?

ABNER Samuel is a jealous man, full of the tyranny of prophecy
Shall we wait him here, or go into the house and be seated
on the mats? Or shall we go forth from the gate towards
him?

SAUL I will stay here, and brighten my sword-edge in the waiting

NELLIE Oh—is it much? *(She looks up from her book)*

MOTHER One of his feet crushed Poor Polly's very sad What made her tell me was Ben Goddard going by I didn't know he was at work again, but he was just coming home, and I asked her about him, and then she went on to tell me of her young man They're all coming home from Selson, so I expect your father won't be long

NELLIE Goodness!—I hope he'll let us get our tea first

MOTHER Well, you were late If he once gets seated in the Miner's Arms there's no telling when he comes

NELLIE I don't care when he does, so long as he doesn't come yet

MOTHER Oh, it's all very well!

They both begin to read as they eat After a moment another girl runs past the window and enters She is a plump, fair girl, pink and white She has just run across from the next house

GERTIE COOMBER Hello, my duck, and how are you?

NELLIE *(looking up)* Oh, alright, my bird

GERTIE Friday to-night No Eddie for you! Oh, poor Nellie! Aren't I glad, though! *(She snaps her fingers quaintly)*

The MOTHER laughs

NELLIE Mean cat!

GERTIE *(giggling)* No, I'm not a mean cat But I like Friday night, we can go jinking off up town and wink at the boys I like market night *(She puts her head on one side in a peculiar, quaint, simple fashion)*

The MOTHER laughs

NELLIE You wink! If she so much as sees a fellow who'd speak to her, she gets behind me and stands on one foot and then another

GERTIE I don't! No, I don't, Nellie Lambert I go like this "Oh, good evening, how are you? I'm sure I'm very pleased——" *(She says this in a very quaint "prunes-and-prisms" manner, with her chin in the air and her hand extended At the end she giggles)*

The MOTHER, with her cup in her hand, leans back and laughs NELLIE, amused in spite of herself, smiles shortly

NELLIE You are a daft object! What about last week, when David Thompson——

GERTIE *puts her hand up and flips the air with affected contempt*

ABNER (*at the gate—calling*) He is coming across the field, an old man in a mantle, alone, followed by two of his prophets

JONATHAN (*joining ABNER*) It is he And coming in anger

ABNER In anger against whom?

JONATHAN Against my father Because we have not destroyed the Amalekite utterly, but have saved the best spoil

ABNER Nay, but it is a foolish thing, to throw fine linen into the fire, and fat young oxen down a dry well

JONATHAN It was the commandment

ABNER Why should the maidens not rejoice in their ornaments, and the God of the Unknown Name enjoy the scent of blood-sacrifice?

They retreat from the gate, SAUL sharpens his sword After a pause, enter SAMUEL, followed by the prophets

SAUL (*laying down his sword*) Blessed be thou of the Lord! I have performed the commandment of the Lord

SAMUEL What meaneth the bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?

SAUL They have brought them from the Amalekites The people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto thy God, but the rest we have utterly destroyed

SAMUEL Stay, and I will tell thee what I have heard out of the inner darkness, this night

SAUL Say on

SAMUEL When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the chieftain of the tribes of Israel, and the Deep poured His power over thee, to anoint thee King? And the Voice out of the deeps sent thee on a journey, saying Go, and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed—Why then did you not obey the Voice, instead of flying upon the spoil, and doing evil in the sight of the Unclosing Eyes?

SAUL Yea, I have obeyed the Voice from the beyond I have gone the way which the Great One sent me, and have brought Agag the King of Amalek prisoner, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites But the people took the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice in Gilgal unto the Lord thy God

SAMUEL Does the Breather of the skies take as great delight in

(Rubs his head, sitting on his heels very close to the fire)

NELLIE *(smiling contemptuously, to herself)* Poor kid!

FATHER *(having wiped his face)* An' there isn't another man in th' kingdom as 'ud stan' 'er that scullery stark naked It's like standin' i' t'crowd watter

MOTHER *(cal ly)* Many a man stands in a colder

FATHER *(shortly)* Ah, I'll back, I'll back there is! Other men's wives brings th' puncheon on to th' 'earthstone, an' gets the watter for 'em, an'——

MOTHER Other men's wives may do more fools'them you won't catch me

FATHER No, you wunna, you may back your life o' that! An' what if you 'ad to?

MOTHER Who'd make me?

FATHER *(blustering)* Me

MOTHER *(laughing shortly)* Not half a dozen such

The FATHER grunts NELLIE, having cleared the table, pushes him aside a little and lets the crumbs fall into hearth

FATHER A lazy, idle, stinkin' trick!

She whisks the tablecloth away without speaking

An' tha doesna come waftin' in again when I'm washin me, tha remembers

ERNEST *(to his mother, who is turning the bread)* Lancy! Swinburne's dead

MOTHER Yes, so I saw But he was getting on

FATHER *(to NELLIE, who has come to the boiler and is kneeling, getting a lading-can full of water)* Here, Nellie, gie my back a wash

*She goes out, and comes immediately with flannel and soap
She claps the flannel on his back*

(Wincing) Ooo! The nasty bitch!

NELLIE bubbles with laughter The MOTHER turns aside to laugh

NELLIE You great baby, afraid of a cold flannel!

She finishes washing his back and goes into the scullery to wash the pots The FATHER takes his flannel shirt from the bookcase cupboard and puts it on, letting it hang over his trousers Then he takes a little blue-striped cotton bag from his pit trousers' pocket and throws it on the table to his wife

sacrifice and burnt offerings as in obedience to the Voice that spoke on the breath of the night? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams

SAUL Is not God the sender of life, and the bread of life? And shall we deny the meat and destroy the bread that is sent?

SAMUEL Behold, is the Lord my God a sutler, to stock the larders of Saul? Lo, He heeds not the fat beef nor the fine raiment, but threshes out His anger in the firmament Amalek has defied the living Breath, and cried mockery on the Voice of the Beyond Therefore the living Wrath will wipe out the Amalekite, by the hand of His servant, Israel And if the Nameless is without compunction, whence the compunction of Saul?

SAUL I feared the people, and obeyed their voice

SAMUEL Yea, that was bravely done! Thou didst not fear the Great Lord thou fearedst the people, smaller than thyself Thou didst not obey the Cry from the midst of the dark, but the voice of the people!—I tell thee, rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord the Lord hath also rejected thee from being King

SAUL Shall a King not hearken to the voice of his people?

SAMUEL The people cried for a King, in the frowardness of their hearts But can they make a King out of one of themselves? Can they whistle a lion forth from a litter of dogs? The people cried for a King, and the Lord gave to them Even thee, Saul But why art thou King? Because of the voice of the people?

SAUL Thou didst choose me out

SAMUEL The finger of the Thunder pointed me to thee, and the Wind of Strength blew me in thy way And thou art King because from out of the middle world the great Wish settled upon thee And thou art King because the Lord poured the oil of His might over thee But thou art disobedient, and shuttest thine ears to the Voice Thou hearest the barkings of dogs and the crying of the people, and the Voice of the Midmost is nothing to thee Therefore thou hast become as nothing unto the Lord, and He that chose thee rejecteth thee again The power of the Lord shall fall away from thee, and thou shalt become again a common man, and a little thing, as when the Lord first found thee

SAUL I have sinned For I have transgressed the commandments

pretty things away from you, College does worse—it makes them all silly and idiotic, and you hate them—and—what then——'

MAGGIE (*seriously*) Why? How?

ERNEST Oh, I don't know. You have to fool about so much, and listen when you're not interested, and see old professors like old dogs walking round as large as life with ancient bones they've buried and scratched up again a hundred times, and they're just as proud as ever. It's such a farce! And when you see that farce, you see all the rest—all the waddling tribe of old dogs with their fossil bones—parsons and professors and councillors—wagging their tails and putting their paws on the bones and barking their important old barks—and all the puppies yelping loud applause.

MAGGIE (*accepting him with earnestness*) Ay! But are they all alike?

ERNEST Pretty well. It makes you a bit sick. I used to think men in great places were great——

MAGGIE (*fervently*) I know you did.

ERNEST ——and then to find they're no better than yourself—not a bit——

MAGGIE Well, I don't see why they should be.

ERNEST (*ignoring her*) ——it takes the wind out of your sails. What's the good of anything if that's a farce?

MAGGIE What?

ERNEST The folks at the top. By Jove, if you once lose your illusion of "great men", you're pretty well disillusioned of everything—religion and everything.

MAGGIE *sits absorbedly, sadly biting her forefinger, an act which irritates him*

(*Suddenly*) What time did Mother go out?

MAGGIE (*starting*) I don't know—I never noticed the time.

ERNEST (*rising and going to the oven, picking up the oven-cloth from the hearth*) At any rate I should think it's five minutes. *He goes to the oven door, and takes from the lower shelf a "cake" loaf, baked in a dripping-pan, and, turning it over, taps it with his knuckles.*

ERNEST I should think it's done. I'll give it five minutes to soak.

He puts the bread in the oven shelf, turns the brown loaves, and shuts the oven door. Then he rises and takes a little note-book from the shelf.

You do look well, Maggie. I don't think I've seen anybody with such a colour. It's fair fine.

MAGGIE *laughs and pulls a book towards her. There is silence.*

ERNEST'S steps are heard descending to the cellar and hammering the coal. Presently he re-mounts. The girls are silent, MAGGIE pretending to read; BEATRICE staring across the room, half smiling, tapping her feet.

ERNEST (*hurrying in and putting the coal on the hob*): Begum, what about the bread?

MAGGIE (*starting up and dilating towards him with her old brilliance*): Oh, what have we——? Is it——? Oh!

ERNEST *has forestalled her at the oven. There issues a great puff of hot smoke. He draws back a little, and MAGGIE utters a quick, tremulous "Oh!"*

BEATRICE (*with concern*): Hel-lo, Ernest! that smells a bit thick!

He pulls out the loaves one after another. There is one brown loaf much blackened, one in tolerable condition, and the white "cake" very much scorched on one side.

BEATRICE *begins to laugh, in spite of her sympathy at the dismay; he is kneeling on the hearth, the oven door open, the oven-cloth in his hand, and the burnt bread toppled out of its tins on the hearth before him. MAGGIE is bending over his shoulder, in great concern. BEATRICE sputters with more laughter. ERNEST looks up at her, and the dismay and chagrin on his face change also to an irresistible troubled amusement at the mishap, and he laughs heartily. MAGGIE joins in, strainedly at first, then with natural shaking, and all three laugh with abandonment, BEATRICE putting her hand up over her face, and again doubling over till her head touches her knees.*

ERNEST: No—no! Won't Ma be wild, though!—What a beastly shame!

BEATRICE *breaks out afresh, and he, though grieved, bubbles again into grudging laughter.*

Another day and the rotten fire would burn slow, but to-night it's ramped like——

BEATRICE: Hell, Ernie!

She goes off again into a wild tossing of laughter, hesitating

of the Lord, which thou didst hear out of the deeps of the night Because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice But now, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may find the Lord, to worship Him

SAMUEL I will not return with thee for thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee from being King over Israel (*SAMUEL turns away SAUL catches hold of the hem of SAMUEL's garment and it tears in his hand*) The Lord hath rent the Kingdom of Israel away from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine, that is better than thou (*pause*),—and the Mighty One that moveth Israel will not lie, nor repent towards thee again for He is not a man that He should repent

SAUL I have sinned, I have sinned, I have turned my face the wrong way Yet honour me now, I pray thee! Honour me before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and turn again with me, that I may find the Lord thy God, and worship Him

SAMUEL (*turning*) Thou hast turned away from the Hidden Sun, and the gleam is dying from out of thy face Thou hast disowned the Power that made thee, and the glow is leaving thy limbs, the glisten of oil is waning on thy brow, and the vision is dying in thy breast Yet because thou art the Lord's anointed I will bless thee again in the sight of the elders Yet if the Lord hath decided against thee, what avails an old man's blessing?

SAUL Yet bless me, my Father

SAMUEL (*lifting his hand*) The Lord be with thee! The Lord's strength strengthen thee! The power and the might of the Lord brighten thine eyes and light thy face the Lord's life lift thy limbs and gladden the walls of thy breast, and put power in thy belly and thy hips! The Lord's haste strengthen thy knees and quicken thy feet!

SAUL (*lifting both hands to heaven*) Lo, I have sinned, and lost myself, I have been mine own undoing But I turn again to Innermost, where the flame is, and the wings are throbbing Hear me, take me back! Brush me again with the wings of life, breathe on me with the breath of Thy desire, come in unto me, and be with me, and dwell in me For without the presence of the awful Lord, I am an empty shell Turn to me, and fill my heart, and forgive my transgression For I will wash myself clean of Amalek,

GERTIE (*with great scorn*): Am I? Oh, am I? Not me! If I heard him whistling this moment, I wouldn't go out to him.

NELLIE: Wouldn't you! I'd shove you out, you little cat!

GERTIE (*with great assumption of amusing dignity*): Oh, would you, indeed!

They all laugh.

BEATRICE pins on her hat before the mirror.

You haven't got Ernest to take you home to-night, Beat. Where is he? With Maggie Pearson? Hasn't he come back yet?

MOTHER (*with some bitterness*): He hasn't. An' he's got to go to college to-morrow. Then he reckons he can get no work done.

GERTIE: Ha!—they're all alike when it suits them.

MOTHER: I should thank her not to come down here messing every Friday and Sunday.

NELLIE: Ah, she's always here. I should be ashamed of myself.

BEATRICE: Well—our Pa! I must get off. Good night, everybody.

See you to-morrow, Nell.

NELLIE: I'll just come with you across the field.

She fetches a large white cashmere shawl and puts it over her head. She disposes it round her face at the mirror.

BEATRICE winks at the MOTHER.

GERTIE: She's going to look for Eddie.

NELLIE (*blushing*): Well, what if I am? Shan't be many minutes, Ma.

MOTHER (*rather coldly*): I should think not! I don't know what you want at all going out at this time o' night.

NELLIE shrugs her shoulders, and goes out with BEATRICE WYLD, who laughs and bids another good night.

MOTHER (*when they have gone*): A silly young hussy, gadding to look for him. As if she couldn't sleep without seeing him.

GERTIE: Oh, he always says, "Come and look for me about eleven."

I bet he's longing to shut that shop up.

MOTHER (*shortly*): Ha! he's softer than she is, and I'm sure that's not necessary. I can't understand myself how folks can be such looneys. I'm sur I was never like it.

GERTIE: And I'm sure I never should be. I often think, when John's coming, "Oh, hang it, I wish he'd stay away!"

MOTHER: Ah, but that's too bad, Gertie. If you feel like that you'd

to the last speck, and remove the source of my sinning (*Dirops his hands—turns to SAMUEL*) Is it well, O Samuel?

SAMUEL May it be well! Bring me hither Agag, King of the Amalekites

SAUL Ho, Jonathan, send here Agag the Amalekite And send thou the chief of the herdsmen, O Abner, for we must wipe away the stain of Amalek swiftly, out of Gilgal

Exeunt JONATHAN and ABNER

SAUL (*to SAMUEL*) The Lord shall be with me again this day, that the Kingdom be not rent from me

SAMUEL Who knoweth the ways of the Deep? I will entreat, ah! for thee in the night-time, and in the day But if He hath turned His face away, what am I but an old man crying like an infant in the night!

Enter AGAG—coming forward delicately

AGAG Surely the bitterness of death is past

SAMUEL (*seizing SAUL'S sword*) As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women (*Rushes on AGAG with sword—AGAG steps behind a wall, SAMUEL upon him*)

Enter HERDSMAN

JONATHAN Better it had been in battle, on the field of the fight

ABNER It is a sacrifice

SAUL (*to HERDSMAN*) Gather together the cattle of the Amalekite which came as spoil, and fasten them in a pen Leave out no sheep and no calf, nor any goat, but put them all in

HERDSMAN It shall be as Saul says

Exit HERDSMAN

SAMUEL (*entering with red sword*) I have hewed him in pieces before the Lord, and his blood has gone up to the Most High, it is in the nostrils of the God of Wrath

SAUL Come now, I pray thee, within the house, and let them bring water for thy feet and food to gladden thine heart

SAMUEL It may not be But I must go to Ramah to entreat for thee before the Lord, and even now must I go And may the Might be with thee

ERNEST (*beginning to unfasten his boots*): Alright—I can't help it, then.

MOTHER: You mean you won't.

•• *There is a pause.* ERNEST *hangs his head, forgetting to unlace his boot further.*

ERNEST (*pathetically*): You don't worry our Nellie. Look, she's out now. You never row her.

MOTHER: I do. I'm always telling her.

ERNEST: Not like this.

MOTHER: I do! I called her all the names I could lay my tongue to last night.

ERNEST: But you're not nasty every time she goes out to see Eddie, and you don't for ever say nasty things about him. . . .

There is a moment of silence, while he waits for an answer

ERNEST: And I always know you'll be sitting here working yourself into a state if I happen to go up to Herod's Farm

MOTHER: Do I?—and perhaps you would, if you sat here waiting all night—

ERNEST: But, Ma, you don't care if Nellie's out.

MOTHER (*after brooding awhile; with passion*): No, my boy, because she doesn't mean the same to me. She has never understood—she has not been—like you. And now—you seem to care nothing—you care for anything more than home—you tell me nothing but the little things: you used to tell me everything; you used to come to me with everything; but now—I don't do for you now. You have to find somebody else.

ERNEST: But I can't help it. I can't help it. I have to grow up—and things are different to us now. {

MOTHER (*bitterly*): Yes, things are different to us now. They never used to be. And you say I've never tried to care for her. I have—I've tried and tried to like her, but I can't, and it's no good.

ERNEST (*pathetically*): Well, my dear, we shall have to let it be, then, and things will have to go their way. (*He speaks with difficulty.*) You know, Mater—I don't care for her—really—not half as I care for you. Only, just now—well, I can't help it, I can't help it. But I care just the same—for you—I do.

MOTHER (*turning with a little cry*): But I thought you didn't!

He takes her in his arms, and she kisses him, and he hides his face in her shoulder. She holds him closely for a moment;

SCENE II

A room in Ramah Night SAMUEL in prayer

SAMUEL Speak to me out of the whirlwind, come to me from behind the sun, listen to me where the winds are hastening When the power of the whirlwind moves away from me, I am a worthless old man. Out of the deep of deeps comes a breath upon me, and my old flesh freshens like a flower I know no age Oh, upon the wings of distance turn to me, send the fanning strength into my hips I am sore for Saul, and my old bones are weary for the King My heart is like a fledgling in a nest, abandoned by its mother My heart opens its mouth with vain cries, weak and meaningless, and the Mover of the deeps will not stoop to me My bowels are twisted in a knot of grief, in a knot of anguish for my son, for him whom I anointed beneath the firmament of might On earth move men and beasts, they nourish themselves and know not how they are alive But in all the places moves Unseen Almighty, like a breath among the stars, or the moon, like the sea turning herself over I eat bread, but my soul faints, and wine will not heal my bones Nothing is good for me but God Like waters He moves through the world, like a fish I swim in the flood of God Himself Answer me, Mover of the waters, speak to me as waves speak without mouths Saul has fallen off, as a ripe fig falls and bursts He, anointed, he moved in the flood of power, he was God's, he was not his own Now he is cast up like a fish among the dry stones, he beats himself against the sun-licked pebbles He jumped out from the deeps of the Lord, the sea of God has seen him depart He will die within the smell of his own violence Lord, Lord, Ocean and Mover of oceans, lick him into the flood of Thyself Wilt Thou not reach for him with the arm of a long wave, and catch him back into the deeps of living God? Is he lost from the sway of the tide for ever and for ever? When the rain wets him, will it wet him Godless, and will the wind blow on him without God in it? Lord, wilt Thou not reach for him, he is Thine anointed? Bitter are the waters of old age, and tears fall inward on the heart Saul is the son whom I anointed, and Saul has crawled away from God, he creeps up the

rocks in vanity, the stink of him will rise up like a dead crab Lord, is it verily so with Saul, is he gone out from Thee for ever, like a creeping thing crawled in vanity from the element of elements? I am old, and my tears run inward, they deaden my heart because of Saul For Saul has crawled away from the Fountain of Days, and the Ancient of Days will know him no more hear the voice of the Lord like waters washing through the night, saying *Saul has fallen away and is no more in the way of the power of God* Yea, what is love, that I should love him! He is fallen away, and stinketh like a dead crab, and my love stinks with him I must wash myself because of Saul, and strip myself of him again, and go down into the deeps of God Speak, Lord, and I will obey Tell me, and I will do it I sink like a stone in the sea, and nothing of my own is left me I am gone away from myself, I disappear in the deeps of God And the oracle of the Lord stirs me, as the fountains of the deep Lo! I am not mine own The flood has covered me and the waters of the beginning sound in the shell of my heart And I will find another King for Israel, I shall know him by the whispers of my heart Lo, I will fill the horn with oil again, with the oil from the body of Him, and I will go into the hills of Judah I will find out one, in whom the power sleeps And I will pour potency over his head and anoint him with God's fecundity, and place him beyond forgetting I will go into the hills of Judah, where the sheep feed among the rocks, and find a man fresh in the morning of God And he shall be King On the morrow I will gather myself and go, silently, carrying the kingship away from Saul, because the virtue is gone out of him And Saul will kill me with a spear, in one stroke, for rage he will kill me, if I tell him But I shall not tell him I shall say I must away to the land of Judah, it is the time to sacrifice in the place of Bethlehem, the appointed time is at hand —So I shall go away from Saul for ever, and never shall I see his face again I shall hide myself away from his face, lest he hurt himself, slaying me I shall go in the morning with sure feet, but the shell of my heart will be weary For I am the Lord's and servant of the Lord, and I go in obedience, even with the alacrity of willingness But alas, that I should have loved Saul, and had pride in him! I am old

MARY: The men will play *her* role.

CLARENCE: Oh, but do let me do this.

MARY: Do what?

CLARENCE: Make a fire and all that.

MARY: The wood-box is empty: bring in some wood.

He goes out.

SPUD: Oh, I wish Mabel weren't so temperamental.

MARY: Thank God for Mabel's temperament, young Intellectual

Where would you be without it?

SPUD: Why, I might get my coffee.

MARY: You get more than coffee from Mabel

SPUD: Maybe I do. But it's rough on an empty stomach.

Enter CLARENCE; lays wood on kitchen table

MARY: In the wood-box, young Dreamer!

CLARENCE: Oh, so sorry!

MARY: Brains and dreams won't start a stove. Hands, muscles, and common-sense must be ready for any emergency, in the new mystic we are bringing into the world.

CLARENCE: I'll take Mabel her breakfast in bed. That will be much the best.

The MILKMAN suddenly appears at the door.

MILKMAN: How much? Got the empty bottles? Any cream?

SPUD: Oh, yes! Let's have cream!

CLARENCE: Mabel only lets us have it on Sundays.

MARY: A pint of cream, two quarts of milk. The cook will give you the bottles to-morrow.

Exit MILKMAN, slamming the screen door CLARENCE follows him out and rings the gong loudly.

SPUD: Why, what is he ringing for?

MARY: No doubt he thinks the bell will bring the breakfast, as the rooster thinks he brings the sun with his noise. It is all part of the male vanity. Woman brings the breakfast, meanwhile.

SPUD: And I suppose she has some hand in making the sun rise, too?

MARY: Certainly. It is the great creative spirit of Woman, the perfected Woman, that keeps the sun in stable equilibrium.

SPUD (*sniggering*): Do you say she keeps the sun in her stable?

Enter IDA.

IDA: Oh-h! I thought it was breakfast.

The Widowing of Mrs Holroyd

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

(1914)

SPUD No, I don't think so—really!

ELIZABETH Oh, why do you always act *mean*?

SPUD I don't, do I? I don't want to

ELIZABETH But you do. Why do you if you don't want to? What do you say you want to write a *pome* for, instead of going a ride up the canyon with me. I call that acting mean.

SPUD But how——?

ELIZABETH Why, because it is

SPUD Because you want me to go riding up the canyon when I don't want to. Isn't that acting mean, when you want me to do a thing I don't want to

ELIZABETH Well, you ought to want to. You don't want to want to, that's where it's so mean of you. If you wanted to want to, you'd want to

SPUD Why?

ELIZABETH Because it would be *fun*. Lots of fun.

SPUD But I tell you I don't like fun. I don't care for it.

ELIZABETH Oh go on! Oh my, don't you just act *mean*!

SPUD And I *hate* lots-of-fun.

ELIZABETH Why, it's impossible, and so you don't hate it. You just want to act mean to me.

SPUD I don't see that *at all*.

ELIZABETH Of course you do——

Enter IDA with a tragic face

IDA The poppies are all coming to pieces while you two children stay flitting here. Sic transit gloria mundi.

ELIZABETH Who's sick then?

SPUD And we've not been flitting.

ELIZABETH If people are so *mean*——

SPUD Do you mean me? Am I mean?

ELIZABETH Yes, I do mean you. You are mean.

SPUD Why am I?

ELIZABETH Ah, goodness, starting that all over again.

IDA Why *are* you mean, anyway, Spud?

SPUD Because I won't go riding up the canyon with Elizabeth when I don't want to.

ELIZABETH But he *ought* to want to.

IDA Why not sacrifice yourself, Spud?

SPUD I won't

SCENE III

Bethlehem an open place in the village An old man on a roof calling aloud and kindling a signal fire

1ST ELDER (*calling, on the roof*) Come in! Come in! Come in!
Come all men in! Come all in to the place of counsel! Gather into the place of counsel, all men gather now Come in! Come in!

2ND ELDER (*on the plaza*) What now?

3RD ELDER The watchman on the fourth hill saw a host of prophets coming, even Samuel among them

2ND ELDER Yea! What does this bode?

JESSE What have we done wrong, that Samuel comes down upon us? If he curses us we are dead men

4TH ELDER Dread is on me The sun looks darkened

3RD ELDER Nay, let us wait It may be he comes in peace

ELIAB (*brother of DAVID*) Why do we, who are men that fear not the lion nor the bear, nor even the Philistine, tremble before the raging of these prophets?

2ND ELDER Hush then! For the Bolt is above us, and can strike out of a clear sky Canst thou hear His meaning, or know His vision, Who is secret save to the prophets? Peace then, hush thy mouth

JESSE Verily, there is no open vision, and the word of One is precious Without Samuel, we should stare with the stare of deaf men, and the fixed eyes of the blind We should run our faces against the wall, and fall with our feet into a hole We should not hear the lion roaring upon us

ELIAB Not so, my Father Without a prophet I seek the lion when he roars about the herd, I slay him without advice from the Lord We live our lives as men, by the strength of our right hand Why heed the howlings of priests in linen ephods, one or many!

JESSE My son, shut thy teeth on such words Seal thy heart to silence The strength of a man lasts for a little time, and wastes like the oil in a lamp You are young, and your lamp is unbroken But those that live long needs must renew their strength again,

heavy sky, because the wings of the Great White Bird send us no stir, there is no freshness for us And so we shiver, and feel our death upon us beforehand, because the Great White Bird has sunk down, and will no more wave his wings gladly towards us

1ST MAN And pray, why should *he* be moping?

2ND MAN Because the sons of men never breathe his name in answer Even as the ferns breathe fern-seed, which is the fume of their answer to the sun, and the little green flowers that are invisible make a perfume like the sky speaking with a voice, answering deep into heaven, so the hearts of men beat the warmth and wildness of an answer to the Great White Bird, who sips it in and is rejoiced, lifting his wings But now the hearts of men are answerless, like slack drums gone toneless They say We ourselves are the Great White Birds of the Universe It is we who keep the wheel going!—So they cry in impertinence, and the Great White Bird lifts his wings no more, to send the wind of newness and morning into us So we are stale, and inclining towards deadness We capture the yellow metal and the white, and we think we have captured the answerer For the yellow gold and the white silver are pure voices of answer calling still from under the oldest dawn, to the Great White Bird, as the cock crows at sunrise So we capture the first bright answerers, and say Lo! we are lords of the answer —But the answer is not to us, though we hold the gold in our fist And the wings of the Bird are slack

1ST MAN What is all this talk? Is the humming-bird less blue, less brilliant?

2ND MAN It is Shem's word, not mine But he says, the Great White Bird will waft his wings even to the beast, for the beast is an answerer But he will withhold his draught of freshness from the new beast called man, for man is impertinent and answerless And the small white birds, the stars, are happy still in the outer boughs, hopping among the furthest leaves of the tree, and twittering their bright answer But men are answerless, and dust settles on them, they shiver, and are woe-begone in spite of their laughter

1ST MAN Nay, thou art a mighty talker! But thy Great White Bird is only a decoy-duck to drag thee into obedience to these demigods, who cannot stoop to sweep the fern-seed for themselves, but must bid the children of men —And thou art a fool duck

and have their vessel replenished And only from the middle-middle of all the worlds, where God stirs amid His waters, can strength come to us

ELIAB Will it not come without Samuel?

JESSE There is a path that the gazelle cannot follow, and the lion knows not, nor can the eagle fly it Rare is the soul of the prophet, that can find the hidden path of the Lord There is no open vision, and we, who can see the lion in the thicket, cannot see the Lord in the darkness, nor hear Him out of the cloud But the word of One is precious, and we perish without it

ELIAB I cannot bow my heart to Samuel Is he a King to lead us into battle, and share the spoil with us? Why should we fare worse without him?

JESSE My son, day follows day, and night travels between the days But the heart of man cannot wander among the years like a wild ass in the wilderness, running hither and thither The heart at last stands still, crying *Whither? Whither?* Like a lost foal whinnying for his dam, the heart cries and nickers for God, and will not be comforted Then comes the prophet with the other vision in his eyes, and the inner hearing in his ears, and he uncovers the secret path of the Lord, Who is at the middle-most place of all And when the heart is in the way of God, it runs softly and joyously, without weariness

ELIAB I would sooner follow the King, with spear and shield

JESSE Samuel is more precious than the King, and more to be obeyed *As God is to Samuel, Samuel to the King is God The King is as a boy awaiting his father's bidding, uneasy till he is told what he shall do Even so Samuel speaks to Saul, with the mouth of authority, to be obeyed For he is the lips of God*

ELIAB For me, give me the right arm of Saul

SAMUEL enters—followed by wild prophets The ELDERS go to meet him

1ST ELDER The Lord be with thee!

SAMUEL The Lord keep this people!

1ST ELDER Comest thou in peace? *

SAMUEL In peace I come to sacrifice unto the Lord Sanctify yourselves and come to sacrifice, according to your families Renew your clothes and purify yourselves

1ST ELDER Into which house will you go?

SAMUEL Into the house of Jesse

JESSE I am here, my lord

SAMUEL Call your household together, and sanctify yourselves,
for we will sacrifice a heifer to the Lord this day, in your house
And it shall be a feast unto you

CURTAIN

SCENE IV

*JESSE's house A small inner courtyard a rude altar smoking, and
blood sprinkled round SAMUEL before the altar, hands bloody
In another part a large red fire with a great pot seething, and
pieces of meat roasting on spits JESSE turning the spits It is
evening, sun going down*

SAMUEL Call your sons Call them one by one to pass before me
For I will look on them, before we sit around to the feast of the
sacrifice

JESSE They are in the house, waiting I will call the first-born
first (*Calling*) Eliab, come forth! Samuel asks for thee!

ELIAB (*entering*) The Lord be with you

SAMUEL (*aside*) Surely the Lord's anointed is before Him! (*Gazes
at ELIAB who is big and handsome*)

SAMUEL (*aside*) I shall not look on his countenance, nor on the
height of his stature For the voice of my soul tells me he is re-
jected The Lord sees not as men see For man looketh on the
outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart

SAMUEL (*to JESSE*) Him hath the Lord not chosen Call thy other
son

JESSE Ha! Abinadab! And, Eliab, gather all thy brothers together,
for the feast shall be set forth

Exit ELIAB

ABINADAB (*entering*) The Lord be with you

SAMUEL (*gazing on ABINADAB*) Neither hath the Lord chosen this

JESSE Go thou, Abinadab! Be all thy brethren ready in the house?

ABINADAB They be all there, waiting for the sacrifice meat

JESSE (*calling*) Come, Shammah! And when I call, come you others in your order, one by one

SHAMMAH (*entering*) The Lord be with you

SAMUEL (*slowly*) Neither hath the Lord chosen this

JESSE Go thou! Nay! Rather go to the fire and turn the spitted meat

SHAMMAH Yea! For it should not singe

JESSE (*calling*) Ho! Son! Come forward!

FOURTH SON The Lord be with you!

SAMUEL Neither hath the Lord chosen this

JESSE Go thou hence, and wait yet a while

FOURTH SON What wouldst thou then with me?

JESSE (*calling*) Ho! Son! (*To him who waits*) Nay, go or stay, as thou wilt But stand aside (*He stands aside*)

FIFTH SON The Lord be with you

JESSE Turn thy face to the sun, that it may be seen

SAMUEL Neither hath the Lord chosen this

JESSE Thou art not he whom Samuel seeks Stand thou aside

(*Calling*) Ho! Son! (*To him who waits*) Bring in thy brother

Enter SIXTH SON *all the other brothers edge in after him*

SIXTH SON The Lord be with you!

SAMUEL Neither hath the Lord chosen this

SIXTH SON Wherefore hast thou called me, my Father?

JESSE Samuel would look on the faces of all my sons Go now!

Who then was not called? Who among you has not come forward?

SEVENTH SON I! Wilt thou me?

JESSE Nay, but come into the light before the prophet of God

SAMUEL Neither hath the Lord chosen this

JESSE Nay, then it is finished, for there be no more

SAMUEL Are here all thy children?

JESSE Yea, verily, there remaineth yet the youngest And behold he keepeth the sheep

SAMUEL Send and fetch him For we will not sit down till he come hither

JESSE Go thou, Shammah, for he will be coming in now I will see——!

Exit JESSE, *also* SHAMMAH

ELIAB My lord, will the Lord of Hosts anoint a King, while Saul yet liveth?

SAMUEL My son, out of the deep cloud the lightning cometh, and toucheth its own Even so, from the whirlwind of the whole world's middle, leaneth out the Wonderful and toucheth His own, but whether the anointing be for prophecy or priesthood, or for a leader or a King over Israel, the Mover of all hath it in His own deeps

ELIAB Yea! But if the Lord anoint a man to be King, can the Lord again take back the anointing, and wipe out the oil, and remove the gift, and undo the man He has made?

SAMUEL The power is beyond us, both before and after Am I not anointed before the people? But if I should say *The power is my own, I will even do my own bidding*, then this is the sin of witchcraft, which stealeth the power of the whirlwind for its own And the power will be taken from me, and I shall fall into a pit

ELIAB It is a hard thing, to be the Lord's anointed

SAMUEL For the froward and irreverent spirit, it is a thing well-nigh impossible

Enter JESSE with DAVID

JESSE This is David, the last of the sons of Jesse

Enter SHAMMAH

SAMUEL (*aside*) I shall arise and anoint him For this is he (*Aloud*) The Lord hath chosen this one (*Takes the horn of oil and holds it over DAVID's head*) The skies will anoint thee with their glory, the oil of the Sun is poured over thee, and the strength of His power Thou shalt be a master of the happenings among men Answer then Does thy soul go forth to the Deep, does the Wonderer move in thy soul?

DAVID Yea, my lord Surely my soul leaps with God!

SAMUEL (*anointing DAVID*) The Glory pours Himself out on thee The Chooser chooseth thee Thou shalt be no more thine own, for the chosen belongs to the Chooser When thou goest in, it shall be at the whisper of the Mover, and when thou comest out, it shall be the Lord Thy strength is at the heart of the world, and thy desires are from thence The walls of thy breast are the front of the Lord, thy loins are the Deep's, and the fire within them is His The Lord looketh out of thy eyes and sits on thy lips Thou

closest thy fist on the Deep, and thy knees smile with His strength He holdeth the bow of thy body erect, and thy thighs are the pillars of His presence Henceforward thou art not thine own The Lord is upon thee, and thou art His

DAVID (*making an obeisance*) I am thy servant, my lord

SAMUEL Ye shall sit around, and divide the meat, and eat of the feast, and bid the neighbours to your feast of sacrifice this night

They move around, fetching trenchers of wood, and a huge dish, and a heap of flat bread They begin to take the meat from the fire, and with a cry lift down the pot

JESSE David is a child, and the Lord hath chosen him What shall become of him? Make it plain to us, O Samuel, this night!

SAMUEL Ask not, for none knoweth Let him live till such time as the Unseen stretcheth out His hands upon him When the time is fulfilled, then we shall know Beforehand no man knoweth And now the meat is ready from the fire, and the feast of sacrifice is prepared, and I have done Eat you of the feast, and live before the Lord, and be blessed Speak nothing of this hour, lest mischance befall you I go my way Do not seek to stay me Call whom ye will to meat, eat then what is before you, for this is your hour

JESSE The sun has gone down, and it is night Wilt thou verily go forth?

Exit SAMUEL

ELIAB He has anointed the youngest, and the oldest he has passed over

JESSE It is the Lord Go, Abinadab, and bid in the neighbours to the feast

ELIAB Nay, it is Samuel, who envies a strong man his strength, and settles on the weak

JESSE These things, at this hour, thou shalt not say Is my son David chosen beneath the heavens, and shall Eliab his brother cast it up a reproach to him? Yea! pile up the dish from the pot, that it may cool, and not burn the hand of him that tasteth

ELIAB (*to DAVID*) Wilt thou be a priest in a blue ephod?

DAVID I know not To-day and to-morrow I shall keep my father's sheep More I know not

ELIAB Canst thou see the Bolt within the cloud? Canst thou hear His voice out of the ground?

DAVID I know not I wish the Lord be with me

ELIAB Is He nearer thee, than thine own father?

DAVID My father sits before me and I see his face But the Lord is in my limbs as a wind in a tree, and the tree is shaken

ELIAB Is not the Lord also in me, thou stripling? Is thine the only body that is visited?

DAVID I know not My own heart I know Thou knowest thine own I wish the Lord be with me

ELIAB Yea, I know my own heart indeed Neither is it the heart of a whelp that minds the sheep, but the heart of a man that holds a spear Canst thou draw my bow, or wield my sword?

DAVID My day is not yet come

JESSE It is enough The guests we have bidden are here! O David, my son, even carry out their portion to the womenfolk, for they may not come here And think thou no more of this day The Lord will move in His own time, thou canst not hasten Him
Exit DAVID (To the NEIGHBOURS) Nay, come! And sit ye to meat! For we will eat this night of the sacrifice that Samuel hath slain before the Lord

NEIGHBOURS Peace be to this house! And is Samuel at once gone forth? Yea! Good seemeth thy feast, O Jesse!

JESSE An heifer, of the first year, fat and goodly! Reach forth thy hand

They all sit around the huge, smoking platter JESSE dips in his hand, and carries the mess to his mouth

NEIGHBOUR Yea! Good is the feast! And blessed be Samuel, who came to Bethlehem this day!

Re-enter DAVID sits down and eats They all dip their hands in the great platter, and eat in silence

Verily, this is a great feast! Surely the Lord hath visited thy house this day, O Jesse!

CURTAIN

SCENE V

SAUL'S house in Gilgal MERAB and MICHAL in the courtyard,
spinning wool, with their maidens They are laughing and
giggling

1ST MAIDEN Now I'll ask one! I'll ask one

MERAB Ask then!

3RD MAIDEN Why does a cow look over a wall?

MICHAL Yah! Yah! We know that old one We all know it

MERAB Who knows the answer? Hold your hand up

Only MICHAL holds up her hand

3RD MAIDEN There! There! They don't know it! Why does a cow
look over a wall?

1ST MAIDEN To see what's on the other side

MICHAL Wrong! Wrong! How silly! (*Laughter*)

2ND MAIDEN Because it wants to get out

MICHAL Wrong! And it's such an easy one

3RD MAIDEN Why does a cow look over a wall?

4TH MAIDEN To scratch its neck (*Much laughter*)

3RD MAIDEN Wrong! Wrong! All wrong! Give it up!

MICHAL No! No! Let them guess again Why does a cow look
over a wall?

1ST MAIDEN To see if David's coming to drive her to pasture
(*Wild laughter*)

MICHAL That's wrong! That's not the answer!

MERAB Give it up?

3RD MAIDEN (*laughing wildly*) To see if David's coming to drive
her to pasture!

MICHAL That's not the answer, *Stupid!*

1ST MAIDEN Why not, say I? It's as good as the real answer —
The cows of Jesse will have to look a long time over a wall
(*Much laughter*) No doubt they're looking at this moment
(*Shrieks of laughter*) Moo-o-o! Moo-o-o! David, come home
(*Hysterical laughter*)

MICHAL Fool! Fool! That's not the answer

1ST MAIDEN Yes That's the answer in Bethlehem Why does a

Bethlehem cow look over a wall?—Because David's come to Gilgal (*Much laughter*)

MICHAL That's wrong! That's wrong!

2ND MAIDEN It's not wrong for a Bethlehem cow

MICHAL But it's not a Bethlehem cow (*Much laughter*)

1ST MAIDEN Is it the heifers of Gilgal? (*Wild laughter*)

4TH MAIDEN Why do the heifers of King Saul look over the wall in Gilgal?

1ST MAIDEN Listening to the music (*Wild laughter*)

MERAB (*amid her laughter*) If my father hears us!

MICHAL You are all fools! You don't know the right answer You can't guess it! You can't guess it

2ND MAIDEN Well, what is it then? Only Michal knows what the cow is looking for! (*Laughter*)

MAIDENS Go on! Go on! Tell us, Michal!

MICHAL Because she can't see through it (*Laughter*)

1ST MAIDEN See through what? (*Wild laughter*)

MAIDENS See through what? (*All laughing*)

2ND MAIDEN Because who can't see through what? (*Shrieks of laughter*)

1ST MAIDEN What a senseless answer! *Because she can't see through it!* (*Shrieks of laughter*)

MICHAL You are all fools! fools! fools! You know *nothing* You don't know *anything*

Enter SAUL—angry

SAUL Enough! Enough! What is all this? Is there a madness among the women? Silence, I say!

MICHAL We are but telling riddles

SAUL It shall not be! What! am I to hear the shrieks of my daughters' folly spoiling the morning? I will riddle you a riddle you shall not care for (*MAIDENS steal away*)

MERAB We had thought my father was abroad among the men

SAUL You had thought, had you! And your father's being abroad was timely to let loose your ribaldry!

MICHAL Nay, Father, there was no ribaldry The maid did only ask, why does a cow look over a wall?

SAUL (*shouting*) Be still! Or I will run this spear through your body Am I to wrestle with the Lord and fail because of the

wantonng of my daughters among their maidens! Oh! cursed
in my offspring as in all things!

MERAB *steals away*

Cursed above all in my womenfolk!

MICHAL Could we not help you, Father, to strive with the Lord?
They say the wise women can command the spirits of the
deep

SAUL Art thou then a seeress? art thou amongst the witches?

MICHAL Not so But Saul my father is among the wondrous Should
not his daughter be as wise as the wise women who can see into
the mysteries?

SAUL (*groaning*) This is the sin of witchcraft! The hand of my
children is against me!

MICHAL Nay, Father, we would indeed be for you, and not against
you

SAUL I have sworn to wipe out the sin of witchcraft from the land,
I have sworn the death of all who lure the people with spirits
and with wizardry I have killed the soothsayers in the towns
and the villages

MICHAL But, Father, might I not see the Bolt in a cloud, or call
the Spirits out of the earth! I am your daughter, is that to be a
witch?

SAUL Thou art a spawn of evil, and I will run thee through

MICHAL But why! Oh, why!

SAUL Thy soul is a soul of a witch that workest against thy father
I call on the Lord, and my heart foams, because He will not hear
me I know it now It is thee, thou witch! (*Wanting to strike her
with the spear*)

MICHAL (*weeping*) It is not so! It is not so! The people say of thee,
the Lord has departed from thee, and I would only help thee with
the Lord, as Jonathan helps thee against the Philistines

SAUL (*horrified*) Is the Deep a Philistine! Nay, now I know thou
art the brood of witches, who catch the powers of the earth by
cunning Now I will surely pierce thee through, that my house
may be pure, and the Fire may look on me again

MICHAL (*screams*) My lord! My lord!

SAUL I will pierce thee through For I have sworn the death of all
witches, and such as steal the powers of earth and sky by their
cunning It will be as good a deed in the sight of the Lord, as

when the prophet of God slew Agag, and Samuel will turn to me again For I am empty when the Lord abandons me And evil spirits break into my empty place, and torture me —I will surely slay this witch, though she were seven times my youngest For she lifts the latch to the evil spirit that gets into my soul un-
awares

MICHAL My lord! My lord! I am no witch! I am not!

SAUL Thou art a witch, and thy hand worketh against me, even when thou knowest not Nay, thou art a witch and thy soul worketh witchcraft even when thou sleepest Therefore I will pierce thee through And I will say unto the people Saul hath slain the witch that gnawed nearest into his heart

MICHAL I will not be slain! (*Shrieks*)

Enter JONATHAN and DAVID, running

JONATHAN My Father!

DAVID O King!

SAUL This is the witch that hinders me with the Lord!

JONATHAN This, Father! Why, Michal is a child, what can she know of witchcraft?

SAUL It is in her will My soul tells me that women with their evil intentions are playing against me, with the Lord And this is she She shall die as the others, seeresses, died, to cleanse the land before the Lord God

DAVID But yet, O King, thy servant has heard it is a hard thing to be a witch, a work of silent labour and of years And this maiden your daughter is not silent, I think, nor does she seem to waste her young brows in secret labours

JONATHAN This is true enough She is a feather-brain

SAUL Yet is her spirit against her father's

MICHAL (*still weeping*) No! No! I would help him

DAVID If some spirit of evil hinder King Saul with the Lord of Hosts, it will be more than the whims of a girl The spirits that hamper the soul of the King cannot be children and girls

SAUL It may be so Yet though I wrestle, the spirit of the Deep will not come to me And the wound is greater than a wound in battle, bleeding inwardly I am a strange man unto myself

DAVID Yet Saul is King, comely in his pride, and a great leader in battle His *deeds* cry unto the whirlwind and are heard Why should Saul wrestle with the Lord? Saul speaks in actions, and in

the time of action the spirit of God comes upon him, and he is King in the sight of all men

SAUL It is even so Yet my soul does not cease to ache, like the soul of a scorned woman, because the Lord will not descend upon me and give me peace in strength

DAVID Who is strong like Saul, in Israel?

SAUL Yet his strength is as a drunken man's—great with despair

DAVID Nay, O King! These are fancies How can my lord speak of despair, when victory is with him, and the light is on his brow in the sight of all Israel!

SAUL Can I so deceive myself?

DAVID Surely the King deceives himself

JONATHAN Surely, Father, it is a strange self-deception you put on yourself

SAUL Can it be so? Yet if so, why does Samuel visit me no more, and withhold his blessing? And why do I feel the ache in me, and the void, where the Full should be? I cannot get at the Lord

MICHAL May I speak, my Father?

SAUL Yea!

MICHAL Why not laugh as you used to laugh, Father, and throw the spear in sport, at a mark, not grip it in anger? Saul is beautiful among men, to make women weep for joy if he smile at them Yet his face is heavy with a frown

SAUL Why should I smile at thee, witch?

MICHAL To gladden me, Father For I am no witch

SAUL And when dost thou need gladdening, say?

MICHAL Now, Father, even here!

SAUL Thy sorrows are deep, I warrant me
Touches her cheek with his fingers

MICHAL Yea! Did not this strange young man—indeed he is but a boy—find me chidden and disgraced and in tears before the King?

SAUL And what then?

MICHAL Who is this boy from the sheepfolds of Bethlehem, that he should think lightly of the King's daughter in Gilgal?

DAVID Nay! What man could think lightly of Michal the daughter of Saul? Her eyes are like the stars shining through a tree at midnight

MICHAL Why through a tree?

SAUL (*laughing suddenly*) Thou bird of the pert whistle! Run!
Run, quail! Get thee among the maidens! Thou hast piped long
enough before the men

MICHAL Even if I run my thoughts run with me

SAUL What thoughts, bird of mischief?

MICHAL That this boy, ruddy with the shepherd's sun, has seen my
tears and my disgrace

DAVID Surely the tears of Michal are like falling stars in the lonely
midnight

MICHAL Why, again, in the night?

SAUL (*laughing aloud*) Be gone! Be gone! No more!

Exit MICHAL

SAUL She is a chick of the King's nest! Think not of her, David!

DAVID But she is pleasant to think of

SAUL Even when she mocks thee?

DAVID Very pleasant

SAUL The young men flee from a mocking woman

DAVID Not when the voice is sweet

SAUL Is Michal's voice sweet? To me at times it is snarling and
bad in my ears

DAVID That is only when the harp-strings of the King's ears are
unstrung

SAUL It may be Yet I think I am cursed in my womenfolk Was
not the mother of Jonathan a thorn in my heart? What dost thou
prescribe for a thorn in the heart, young wiseling?

DAVID Pluck it out, O King, and throw it aside, and it is forgotten

SAUL But is it easy to pluck out a rancorous woman from the
heart?

DAVID I have no certain knowledge Yet it should not be hard, I
think

SAUL How?

DAVID A man asks in his heart *Lord, Who fannest the fire of my
soul into strength, does the woman cast fuel on the Lord's fire
within me, or does she cast wet sand?* Then if the Lord says *She
casts wet sand*, she departs for ever from a man's presence, and
a man will go nigh unto her no more, because she seeks to quench
the proper fire which is within him

SAUL Thou art wiser than if thou hadst been many times wived
Thou art a cocksure stripling

DAVID My brothers say of me, I am a cocksure malapert Yet I do not wish to be ' Why am I so, my lord?

SAUL (*laughing*) It must be the Lord made thee so

DAVID My brother has struck me in the face, before now, for words in which I saw no harm

SAUL (*laughing*) Didst see the harm afterwards?

DAVID Not I I had a bruised mouth, and that was harm enough
But I thought still the words were wise

SAUL (*laughing*) Dost think so even yet?

DAVID Yea, they were wise words But unwisely spoken

SAUL (*laughing heartily*) The Lord sends the wisdom, and leaves thee to spend it! You offer a tit-bit to a wolf, and he take your fingers as well

DAVID I shall learn in the King's household

SAUL Among the wolves?

DAVID Nay, the lion is nobler than the wolf

SAUL He will not grudge thee thy callow wisdom—I go to speak with Abner

DAVID Can I serve the King in anything?

SAUL Not now

Exit SAUL

DAVID He has gone in good humour

JONATHAN We found him in an evil one

DAVID Evil spirits out of the earth possess him, and laughter from a maiden sounds to him as the voice of a hyena sounds to a wounded man stricken in the feet

JONATHAN It is so He rails at his daughter, and at the mother who bore me, till my heart swells with anger Yet he was not always so Why is it?

DAVID He has lost the Lord, he says

JONATHAN But how? Have I lost the Lord, too?

DAVID Nay! You are good

JONATHAN I wish I knew how my father had lost the Lord—You, David, the Dawn is with you It is in your face—Do you wrestle before the Lord?

DAVID Who am I, that I should wrestle before the Lord? But when I feel the Glory is with me, my heart leaps like a young kid, and bounds in my bosom, and my limbs swell like boughs that put forth buds—Yet I would not be vainglorious

JONATHAN Do you dwell willingly here in Gilgal?

DAVID I am strange here, and I miss my father, and the hills where the sheep are, in Bethlehem Yet I comfort myself, turning my soul to the Nameless, and the flame flares up in my heart, and dries my tears, and I am glad

JONATHAN And when my father has been bitter and violent, and you go alone in tears, in a strange place—I have seen the tears, and my heart has been sad—then do you yearn for Bethlehem, and your own?

DAVID I am weak still—But when I see the stars, and the Lord in darkness alive between them, I am at home, and Bethlehem or Gilgal is the same to me

JONATHAN When I lie alone in camp, and see the stars, I think of my mother, and my father, and Michal, and the home place—You, the Lord becomes a home to you, wherever you are

DAVID It is so I had not thought of it

JONATHAN I fear you would never love man nor woman, nor wife nor child, dearly

DAVID Nay! I love my father dearly, and my brothers and my mother

JONATHAN But when the Lord enters your soul, father or mother or friend is as nothing to you

DAVID Why do you say so?—They are the same But when the Lord is there, all the branches are hidden in blossom

JONATHAN Yea!—I, alas, love man or woman with the heart's tenderness, and even the Lord cannot make me forget

DAVID But nor do I forget—It is as if all caught fire at once, in the flame of the Hope

JONATHAN Sometimes I think the Lord takes from me the flame I have I love my father And my father lifts the short spear at me, in wild anger, because, he says, the Fire has left him, and I am undutiful

DAVID The King is the Lord's anointed The King has known, as none know, the strong gladness of the Lord's presence in his limbs And then the pain of wanting the Lord, when He cometh not, passes the pain of a woman mourning for the man she loves, who has abandoned her

JONATHAN Yet we love the King The people look up to him Abner,

the chief captain, is faithful to him unto death Is this nothing to a man?

DAVID To a man, it is much To the Lord's anointed, it is much riches But to the King whom the Lord hath rejected, even love is a hurt

JONATHAN Is my father truly rejected from being King, as Samuel said? And merely that he spared Agag and a few Amalekite cattle? I would not willingly have drawn the sword on naked Agag

DAVID Who knows? I know not —When a people choose a King, then the will of the people is as God to the King But when the Lord of All chooses a King, then the King must answer to the Lord of All

JONATHAN And the Lord of All required the death of defenceless Agag?

DAVID Amalek has set his will against the Whirlwind ✓ There are two motions in the world The will of man for himself, and the desire that moves the Whirlwind When the two are one, all is well, but when the will of man is against the Whirlwind, all is ill, at last So all is decreed ill, that is Amalek And Amalek must die, for he obstructs the desire of the breathing God

JONATHAN And my father?

DAVID He is King, and the Lord's anointed

JONATHAN But his will is the will of a man, and he cannot bend it with the Lord's desire?

DAVID It seems he cannot Yet I know nothing

JONATHAN It grieves me for my father Why is it you can soothe him? Why cannot I?

DAVID I know not It is the Lord

JONATHAN And why do I love thee?

DAVID It is the Lord

JONATHAN But do you love me again, David?

DAVID If a man from the sheep dares love the King's son, then I love Jonathan But hold it not against me for presumption

JONATHAN Of a surety, lovest thou me, David?

DAVID As the Lord liveth

JONATHAN And it shall be well between us, for ever?

DAVID Thou art the King's son But as the Lord liveth and keepeth us, it shall be well between me and thee And I will serve thee

JONATHAN Nay, but love my soul

DAVID Thy soul is dear to my soul, dear as life

They embrace silently

JONATHAN And if my father sends thee away, never forget me

DAVID Not while my heart lives, can I forget thee —But David will easily pass from the mind of the son of the King

JONATHAN Ah never! For my heart is sorrowful, with my father, and thou art my comfort I would thou wert King's son, and I shepherd in Bethlehem

DAVID Say not so, lest thine anger rise on me at last, to destroy me

JONATHAN Nay, it will not

CURTAIN

SCENE VI

Yard of SAUL'S house in Gilgal MICHAL, with tambourine, singing or talking to herself

MICHAL As for me, I am sad, I am sad, I am sad, and why should I not be sad? All things together want to make me sad I hate the house when the men are gone to war All the men are gone out against the Philistine Gone these many days And never a victory No one coming home with spoil, and no occasion to dance I am sad, I am sad, my life is useless to me Even when they come, they will not bring David My father looked pleasantly on him for a while, then sent him away So are men! Such is a king! Sent him away again! And I know, some day when the Lord has left Saul, he will marry me to some old sheik —Unless he dies in the war Anyhow, everybody is gone, and I am dull, dull They say it is the Lord But why should the Lord make the house of Saul dreary? As for me, I don't know whether the Lord is with me, or whether He is not with me How should I know? Why should I care? A woman looks with different eyes into her heart, and, Lord or no Lord, I want what I want I wish I had a sure charm to call back David, son of Jesse The spells I have tried were no good I shall try again with the sand and the

bones (*She puts a little sand, and three small white bones, in her tambourine—mutters and bends—tosses her tambourine softly and drops it on the ground kneels and gazes intently*) Bones, bones, show me the ways in the sand Sand, lie still, sand, lie still and speak Now then, I see the hills of Judah, where Bethlehem is But David is not there, he is gone At least I don't see him In the sand is a road to Gilgal, by the white crown-bone But he is not coming this way, that I can see Where else? Where else? This must be Elah in the sand, where my father is And there is Shochoh, opposite, where the Philistines are Ah yes, two hills, and a valley between, with a brook in the bottom And my father with our men on one slope, the Philistines on the other Ah yes, that will be my father among our men, at least that is his black tent But Jonathan is not there O woe, if Jonathan were killed! My heart is afraid for Jonathan Though how should I know Jonathan as a speck of sand, anyhow? There is nothing in the sand I am no wise woman, nor a seeress, even though I would like to be How dull it is! How dull it is here! How dull it is to be a woman! (*Throws away her tambourine*) Why do they sit in front of the Philistines without defeating them!

WATCHMAN (*entering from the gate*) Men are coming from the host of Saul They come with a litter

SOLDIER (*entering*) The Lord strengthen you

MICHAL Who comes? Is it news of victory?

SOLDIER No, lady! Jonathan is wounded in the knee, and comes home to rest

MICHAL Wounded in the knee? And what else?

SOLDIER How, else?

MICHAL Oh, slow-witted! What other news? Are the Philistines defeated and slaughtered?

SOLDIER Nay, they are not

MICHAL Then what has happened?

SOLDIER Naught has happened

MICHAL Where is the King? Is all well with him?

SOLDIER The King is with the host at Elah, and all is well with him

MICHAL Then where are the Philistines?

SOLDIER The Philistines are arranged over against us, on the opposite hill at Shochoh

MICHAL And what has happened? Do Israel and the Philistines sing songs to one another?

SOLDIER Nay! A portion of the men go forth to fight, wellnigh each day And the champions of the Philistines come each day to challenge us

MICHAL And who answers out of Israel?

SOLDIER None answers

MICHAL None answers! Yea, that is news to hear! Has Israel never a champion? Is my father, the King, sick?

SOLDIER Many champions have we, forsooth But we are men And this Philistine is huge he is out of the old days, before the Flood He is a huge giant, whose great voice alone shakes the tents

MICHAL And not one man answers his challenge?

SOLDIER Nay, where shall we find a huge giant among us, to answer him?

MICHAL If he were a mountain, I would prick him with my needle

SOLDIER Yes, and would you might prick the eyeballs of him!

Enter litter-bearers with JONATHAN

MICHAL This is most strange!—Ah, Jonathan, and art thou wounded in the knee?

JONATHAN Yea!

MICHAL The Lord be praised it is not in the calf!

JONATHAN Hush, shrew!

MICHAL Did the Philistine giant wound thee in the knee, O Jonathan?

JONATHAN A Philistine wounded me

MICHAL But I hear they boast a giant, a champion

JONATHAN Yea, verily

MICHAL A huge unheard-of giant

JONATHAN Huge enough and heard daily

MICHAL What does he say, daily?

JONATHAN Oh—he asks that we send down a man to fight with him And if he, the Philistine of Gath, slay our man, then shall all Israel be servant to the Philistines But if our man slay this Goliath, then the Philistines shall be our servants And seeing that this giant be so large, no ordinary man can get past his sword to attack him, therefore the King is not willing that the

fight be settled between champions, lest we lose our freedom in a moment

MICHAL And dare no man go up against this huge one?

JONATHAN Nay, many dare And many a man seeks to go I myself would willingly go Though I know I should die But what would I care about dying, if the Philistine died first? Yet I doubt I should die first, and Israel be delivered into bondage Hence the King will accept no champion from our midst But we shall sally forth in daily companies, and defeat the Philistines at length

MICHAL At a great length

JONATHAN Hast thou wounds or pain, to find it so?

MICHAL Yea, the wound of shame, that Israel, challenged, is dumb

Israel has no champion! What wound of shame for the woman!

JONATHAN Why risk the nation in a fight between champions?

We are all champions, and we all fight the Philistine

MICHAL Only not this big one

JONATHAN In single combat, with the fate of the nation hanging in the issue, no! But if Goliath mingle in the battle ranks, then every man of Benjamin will have at him

MICHAL And mingles he not in the battle ranks?

JONATHAN Ah no! He saves himself for the single combat, for this bawling of the challenge and the rattling of the oversized shield

MICHAL Some man should think of a way

JONATHAN Think thou! I must rest, and recover, and return to the field of battle

CURTAIN

SCENE VII

The camp of the Israelites at Elah In the background, black tents of worsted Morning Men assembling in arms, to battle Much shouting of war-cries—much noise of war-like anticipation DAVID entering, carrying a staff

DAVID Is yon the tent of Eliab of Bethlehem?

SOLDIER The tent of the sons of Jesse

SHAMMAH (*coming armed from the tent*) Is not this our brother David? (*calling*) Ho! David is here! (*embracing DAVID*) And art thou also come to the fight?

ELIAB (*also armed*) What, David! Hast thou left the sheep to come among the men-at-arms? (*They embrace*)

DAVID My father sent me here to inquire of you, and to bring you bread, and the cheeses for the captain of your thousand. The loaves and the parched corn and the cheeses have I left with the keeper of the victuals. But where is Abinadab?

ELIAB With the host, where we must form to battle.

The men are forming in loose array, ABINADAB comes and embraces DAVID

ABINADAB Hast thou come from Bethlehem? And how is our father, and all the homestead?

DAVID Yea, all are well. My father sent me with victual, and to see how you fare, and to take your pledge.

ELIAB The pledge we will give you after the fight. And how fares my young son at home?

CAPTAIN (*calling*) The thousand of Judah, get you to your hundreds; get you to your places. (*Bustle of men falling into rank*)

DAVID (*following his brothers*) Your son was bitten by a hound, but all is well.

ELIAB What hound, forsooth? And lives the dog yet?

SAUL (*passing*) Five hundred of Benjamin, lead into the valley!

SOLDIERS Ah! Ah! The five hundred are moving forth! (*Loud shouting of SOLDIERS*)

DAVID And how goes the fight?

SHAMMAH Wellah, this way and that, as wind bloweth!

DAVID The days are many, that you are afield. My father grew uneasy, and could stay no longer. Long days and no news are ill to live, said he.

ELIAB Tell my father, this is no folding of sheep, out here.

DAVID And has no weighty blow been struck, on either side?

SOLDIERS (*calling*) Ha! Ha! The five hundred are near the brook! And behold, the Philistine champion cometh forth from the ranks, to meet them. (*Hush in the camp*)

MIGHTY VOICE OF GOLIATH Ho! Ho, there! Israel! Why are ye come to set your battle array? Am I not a Philistine, and ye

servants to Saul? Choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me

DAVID (*in the hush*) But who is this?

SOLDIERS Ha! Ha! The five hundred are fleeing back from him!
They are sore afraid

A hush

SHAMMAH This is Goliath, their champion

VOICE OF GOLIATH Ha! ha! Why run ye? Choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me. If he can fight with me, and kill me, then will we be your servants. But if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us. It is fairly said. Choose you a man for you!

DAVID (*in the hush*) Surely he is a huge man! Goeth no man forth to meet him?

SOLDIER Have you seen this man? Surely, forty days has he come up to defy Israel. And it shall be, that the man who killeth him, the King will enrich him with great riches, and will give him his daughter, and make his father's house free in Israel.

DAVID What will the King do to the man that killeth this Philistine and taketh away the reproach from Israel? Will he surely give him his daughter? The daughter of his house in Gilgal?

SOLDIER Ay, surely he will. And much riches. And make his father's house free in Israel.

DAVID Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?

SOLDIERS Ah! He is what thou seest.

DAVID As the Lord liveth, there shall be an end to him.

SOLDIERS Would it were so! But who shall do it?

DAVID Is the Lord naught in the reckoning? The Lord is with me, and I will do it.

SOLDIERS Thou? How canst thou kill this great giant?

DAVID I can do it. I will kill him, as the Lord liveth in me, were his name six times Goliath.

SOLDIER Nay, but how?

DAVID The Lord will show you how. I, I will kill him.

ELIAB (*coming forward*) What art thou doing here? Why camest thou hither, and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thy heart. For thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle

DAVID What have I now done? Was I not sent by my father, for a cause?

ELIAB (*turning away in anger*) Thou didst persuade him, in the vanity of thy mind

SOLDIER Shall we say to Saul of thee, that thou art minded to kill the giant?

DAVID Say so to him For the Lord is with me

ANOTHER SOLDIER Verily, feelest thou in the power to kill this mighty man?

DAVID Verily! And is it sooth the King will give his daughter to him that slayeth the roaring Philistine?

SOLDIER Yea, it is sooth, for it is so proclaimed But tell us how thou wilt come nigh him, to slay him

DAVID The Lord will show you

SOLDIERS Saul is coming

SAUL (*approaching*) Which is this man will go forth against the Philistine?

DAVID Let no man's heart fail because of the giant, for thy servant will go out and fight with him

SAUL Thou? Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for thou art but a youth, and he is a man of war from his youth

DAVID Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God

SAUL But neither lion nor bear came against thee in greaves of brass nor armed with sword a man's length How shallst thou fight with this giant in panoply?

DAVID The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of the Philistine

SAUL Thou shalt go And the Lord be with thee (*To ARMOUR-BEARER*) Fetch hither my armour, and another sword For we will put them on him •

Exit ARMOUR-BEARER

DAVID Shall thy servant go in armour clad?

SAUL How else canst thou keep thy life?

VOICE OF GOLIATH Ho! men of Saul! Is there no man among you, to answer when a fighter calls? Are you all maidens, combing

your hair? Where is Saul, the slayer of foemen? Is he crying like a quail to his God? Call to Baal, and call to Astaroth, for the God of Israel is a pigeon in a box

DAVID Ha! Lord God! Deliver him into my hand this day!

SAUL Yea!

Enter ARMOUR-BEARER

Put the coat of proof upon him, and the helmet of brass

They put the armour of the KING on DAVID

DAVID I am not used to it

SAUL (*unbuckling his sword*) Take thou my sword

DAVID (*girding it on*) Thy servant hath honour beyond his lot

Lo! I am strange in this array! The Lord hath not intended it for me (*Takes shield*)

SAUL Now thou art ready A man shall bear thy shield

DAVID Then let me go But let me assay this sword and battle harness that is on me (*Sets forth Tries his sword, goes a little way Turns suddenly back*) I cannot go with these, for I have not proved them

Drops his shield Hastily unbuckles sword, and gives it to

SAUL Unfastens the helmet The ARMOUR-BEARER disarms

DAVID

SAUL Then thou goest not! Uncovered thou canst not go

DAVID As the Lord liveth, I will go with naught but God upon me

VOICE OF GOLIATH The God of Israel is a blue pigeon in a box, and the men of Israel are quails in the net of the Philistine Baal is laughing aloud, and Astarte smiles behind her sleeve, for Israel is no more than worms in a dung-hill

DAVID I shall go Sound the trumpet!

He picks up his staff, recrosses hastily to the back of the stage, downwards as to a valley Stoops in the distance meanwhile trumpet sounds and the voice of the HERALD is heard, crying

HERALD Come down, Goliath! Come forward, Philistine! For Israel sendeth a champion against thee (*Noise of shouting in both camps*)

SHAMMAH See, David is picking smooth stones from the brook bed

ABINADAB He has put them in his leather pouch, and taken his

sling in his hand Surely he will go after the Philistine as after a wolf

SAUL The Philistine cometh down with his shield-bearer before him—Yea, but the youth is naked and unafraid

VOICE OF GOLIATH Where art thou, champion of Israel? I see thee not Hast thou already perished of thy dread?

VOICE OF DAVID (*small*) Yea, I am coming

VOICE OF GOLIATH Thou!

SAUL How he disdains the youth! If we have lost all on this throw!

VOICE OF GOLIATH Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves?

Now shall Astaroth slay thee with spittle, and Baal shall break thy bones with a loud laugh

VOICE OF DAVID Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, Whom thou hast defied

VOICE OF GOLIATH Come! Ha-ha! Come to me, and I will give thy flesh to the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the hills

Meanwhile the bystanders, SHAMMAH, ABINADAB, SOLDIERS, all save the ARMOUR-BEARER and SAUL, have been running to the far background, to look closer

VOICE OF DAVID This day will the Lord deliver thee into my hand, and I will smite thee, and take thy head from thee

VOICE OF GOLIATH Ha! Ha! Canst thou chirp? Come over, thou egg, that they see me swallow thee (*Loud yelling from Philistines*)

VOICE OF DAVID I will give the carcass of the host of the Philistines this day to the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the earth That all the earth may know there is a God in Israel (*Loud yelling of Israel*)

VOICE OF GOLIATH Come, thou whistling bird! Come! Seest thou this sword? (*Loud yelling of Philistines*)

VOICE OF DAVID Yea! and all this people shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear for the battle is the Lord's, and He will deliver you into our hands (*Great defiance heard in Israel*)

VOICE OF GOLIATH Must we die of thy talking? And wilt thou not come forth? Then must I fetch thee (*Tumult in Philistia*)

ARMOUR-BEARER The Philistine is hastening down!—Oh, and behold, the youth is running at him fast! Ha-a-a!

ARMOUR-BEARER *rushes away, leaving SAUL alone*

SAUL (*in a pause*) Ah! Ah!—Lord, my Lord!—Is he down? (*Great shouting heard—men running*) What? Yea, the Philistine has fallen! The boy but slang a stone at him! It is the Lord! Nay, he riseth not!—Ah God! was it so easy a thing? Why had I not done it! See, see, Saul, see, thou King of Israel, see this nameless boy who hath run upon the fallen Philistine, and seized his sword from his hand, and stands upon his body hewing at the neck of the giant! Ah, sight for the King of Israel who stands alone, in safety, far off, and watches this thing done for him! Yea, they may shout! It is not for me It is for that boy, whom I know not How should I know him, with his young beard on his lip! It is a hard thing to hack off the head of such a giant, and he cannot find the neck joint I see him stooping! (*A great wild shout is heard*) Ah! Even so! Even so!

ABNER *enters, running*

ABNER The youth hath slain the Philistine with a stone from a sling, and even now has hewn his head loose, and is holding it up before the armies

SAUL Even so!

ABNER Yea! He stands upon the body of that which was Goliath, and holds up the head to Israel! The Lord has prevailed (*Loud shouting*)

SOLDIERS (*running past*) The host of the Philistines is in flight! After them! After them!

ABNER Shall we not pursue? Will not the King lead the pursuit? Lo! they flee in abandon, flinging away their spears in their haste

SAUL This needs no leader Any man can strike in the back of a running enemy What of the youth?

ABNER He hath stripped the Philistine of his gear Yea, I can see the body of the giant naked in blood upon the ground

SAUL Who is this youth? Whose son is he?

ABNER As thy soul liveth, O King, I cannot tell

SAUL Enquire thou whose son the stripling is

ABNER He is coming towards the brook I will bring him hither

Exit ABNER

SAUL Yea, he is coming! And alone up the slope, for the men have

gone like hounds after the Philistine, and to the stripping of the tents Yea, as bees swarm in upon the sweetmeats, when the window is opened This is a day to make songs for But not in the name of Saul Whom will the maidens sing to? To him yonder, coming up the hill slowly, with the swinging head, and the bright brass armour of the Philistine To that ruddy-faced fair youth, with a young beard on his mouth It seems I should know him, if I would Yea, I shall know him in my hour Ah the blithe thing! Ah the blithe boy! Ah God! God! was I not blithe? Where is it gone? Yea, where! Blitheness in a man is the Lord in his body Nay, boy, boy! I would not envy thee the head of the Philistine Nay, I would not envy thee the Kingdom itself But the blitheness of thy body, that is thy Lord in thee, I envy it thee, with a sore envy For once my body too was blithe But it hath left me It hath left me Not because I am old And were I ancient as Samuel is, I could still have the alertness of God in me, and the blithe bearing of the living God upon me I have lost the best I had it, and have let it go Ha! whither is he going? He turns aside, among the tents Aha! Aha! So it is Among the tents of Judah, and to the booth of the Bethlehemite! So, he has gone in to lay down his spoil, the helmet of brass, and the greaves of brass, the coat, the great sword, and the shirt fringed with scarlet Lay them by, they are thine Yea, they are thine, lay them in thy tent No need to bring them unto the King They are no king's spoil Yea, lead him hither, Abner! Lead him hither! He is bringing the head in his hand Oh yes, the champion, the victor! He is bringing the head in his hand, to swing it under the nose of the King But the sword, the great sword, and the greaves of brass and the body-spoil he has e'en laid by in his own tent, where no man may lay hand on it Oh! it is a shrewd youth, and a canny youth, cunning as the Lord makes them

Enter DAVID, with head of GOLIATH—and ABNER

SAUL So! Comest thou again?

DAVID Even so! To lay the head of thine enemy before thee, O King!

SAUL Whose son art thou, thou young man?

DAVID I am the son of thy servant Jesse the Bethlehemite

SAUL Art thou so! Ay, thou art David! And brother to Eliab, and Abinadab, and Shammah, three men of war!—Thou hast put

cunning in thy skill, and slain thine enemy as he were a hare
among the bushes

ABNER See! The place where the stone sunk in, in the side of the
forehead bone! It lies still there, the stone of David

SAUL Yea, that was death without weapons meeting, indeed

ABNER Surely the Lord was in that round stone, that digged the
pit in Goliath's head-bone!

*DAVID Except the Lord had been with me, I had not done it

SOLDIERS (*standing round*) Yea, the Lord sped the hand of David
The Lord is with this young man

SAUL Praise we must give to the Lord, and to David the promised
reward Seekest thou thy reward at the King's hand, thou young
man?

DAVID It is as the King willeth Yet what should the reward be?

SAUL Hast thou not heard it proclaimed?

DAVID Nay, I arrived but in the dawn, with provender from my
father to my brethren

SAUL Didst thou not set forth even now against the Philistine,
hoping big for the reward?

DAVID Not so, O King But the Lord moved me to go, to take off
the shame and the reproach from the army of the living God

SAUL Thou hast done well! Yet claimest thou thy reward?

DAVID Shall I not hear from the King's mouth, what the reward
should be?

SAUL How was it said, Abner? Recallest thou?

ABNER Yea, O King! Riches and the King's daughter, and freedom
for his father's house, to the man that should slay Goliath in the
single combat

SAUL Single-handed hath David slain Goliath, indeed! Even with-
out any combat at all But how likest thou thy reward, thou
young man?

DAVID Were it mine, O King, I should rejoice for my father's sake
and fall to the ground beneath the honour put upon me, being
son-in-law to the King

SAUL Even so! Now thou shalt stay with me, and live in my house
and return no more to thy father's house And all shall be done
to thee, as was said—For surely thou hast brought much honour
upon Israel And we will make much of thee For thou art
champion of Israel in the sight of all the people And thou shalt

sit at the King's right hand, that all men may delight in thee
Yet, since thou art young, and fresh from the sheepfold, we will
not hasten thee to thy confusion But thou shalt dwell as a son
among us, and rise in degree as a son rises, sitting at the King's
meat And behold, my elder daughter Merab, her will I give thee
to wife Only be thou valiant for me, and fight the Lord's battles
DAVID Let but thy servant serve thee, O King, in the sight of the
Lord And Saul will take the head of this Philistine to put it on
a pole?
SAUL Nay! Thou thyself shalt bring it before the people, in Jeru-
salem of Judah

CURTAIN

SCENE VIII

*The king's tent at Elah a square tent of dark worsted, with the wide
front open Heaps of panoply and spoil without Within, in
the public part of the tent, SAUL, with DAVID on his right hand,
JONATHAN on his left, and sitting around, the CAPTAINS of the
armies of Israel*

SAUL We have numbered the armies in tens, in hundreds, and in
thousands And now are all men returned from pursuing after
the Philistine, and the spoil is all brought in And the wounded
of the Philistine have fallen by the way, even to the valley of
Ekron and the gates of Gath, their dead are more than their living
Yet are their princes within the land, holding on to strong places
Therefore we will rejoice not yet, nor go home to the feasting
But while his heart is sunk low, we will follow up the Philistine
in every place where he holds out Is it sooth?

CAPTAINS It is good, O King •

ABNER The blow that was struck with a pebble, we will follow up
with swords and spears, till in the Lord's name not one uncir-
cumcised remains in the land

CAPTAINS It is good! It is good! (*They strike their shields*)

SAUL (*presenting DAVID*) This is David, that slew Goliath the Philis-

time, and delivered Israel from reproach Sits not David high in the heart of every man in Israel, this day ?

CAPTAINS Yea ! David ! David ! (*Striking shields*)

SAUL Who is first among the men of war this day ? Is it not David, my son David ?

CAPTAINS David ! David ! It is David !

SAUL Yea, Captains ! Your King is but captain of the captains !

Whom shall we set over the men of war this day ? Shall it not be David ? This time, shall not David lead the hosts ? Is he not the first against the Philistine ? Yea, in this foray of triumph and this campaign of victory, should any man lead but David ?

CAPTAINS It is good ! David shall command, till we return home this time from smiting the Philistine (*They clash shields with martial noise*)

SAUL (*to DAVID*) Hearest thou, David, son of my delight ?

DAVID O King, I am no leader of men of war I have no skill in arts of battle Honour me not to my confusion

SAUL Nay, this time shalt thou take the charge For in *this* fight art thou the first man among the men of war in Israel Answer, Captains ! Is it not so ?

CAPTAINS Verily ! This time we will have David

ABNER Verily, save David lead us, we will not go

The CAPTAINS rise, and lift locked shields before DAVID as if to raise him up

SAUL If we go not now, we lose the golden hour The choice is upon thee, David

DAVID Thy servant will do according to thy will, O King, and according to the will of Abner, and of the Captains (*He rises before the CAPTAINS*) But I am young, and not brought up to war And the Captains and the strong men will laugh at me, seeing my inexperience and my presumption

ABNER Nay ! No man shall find occasion to laugh at thee, for the fight is in thee as in a young eagle Leading to war shalt thou learn war

DAVID It is as the King and the Captains shall bid me

SAUL (*rising*) We will make ready, and send out the news through the camp *In this is David our leader !* Then David shall choose his men, and go forth He shall give his orders, and the Captains shall march at his bidding David, the day is thine !

Salutes The CAPTAINS again salute DAVID with spear on shield, then they go out

CAPTAINS To thee, David!

Exeunt CAPTAINS

DAVID (to JONATHAN) How shall I bring this to a pass?

JONATHAN Thy soul will not fail thee Thou art the young lion of Judah, thou art the young eagle of the Lord O David, is it well between me and thee, and hast thou verily not forgotten me?

DAVID Verily, thou hast not left my soul But how shall I go before these men?

JONATHAN We have sworn a covenant, is it not between us? Wilt thou not swear with me, that our souls shall be as brothers, closer even than the blood? O David, my heart hath no peace save all be well between thy soul and mine, and thy blood and mine

DAVID As the Lord liveth, the soul of Jonathan is dearer to me than a brother's—O brother, if I were but come out of this pass, and we might live before the Lord, together!

JONATHAN What fearest thou then?

DAVID In the Lord, I fear nothing But before the faces of men, my heart misgives me

JONATHAN Sittest thou not high in the hearts of Israel?

DAVID Yea, but who am I, to be suddenly lifted up! Will they not throw me as suddenly down?

JONATHAN Who would throw thee down, that art strong as a young eagle, and subtle as the leopard?

DAVID I will rest in the Lord

JONATHAN And in me wilt thou not trust?

DAVID I will trust thee, Jonathan, and cleave to thee till the sun sets on me Thou art good to me as man never before was good to me, and I have not deserved it Say thou wilt not repent of thy kindness towards me!

JONATHAN O brother, give me the oath, that naught shall sunder our souls, for ever

DAVID As the Lord liveth, my soul shall not part for ever from the soul of my brother Jonathan, but shall go with him up the steeps of heaven, or down the sides of the pit And between his house and my house the covenant shall be everlasting For as the hearts of men are made on earth, the heart of Jonathan is gentlest and most great

JONATHAN The^ccovenant is between us (*Covers his face*)

DAVID (*after a pause*) But how shall I go before these captains,
O my brother? Comest thou not with me? Wilt thou not stand
by me? Oh, come!

JONATHAN I am limping still in the knee, and how shall I lead a
foray? But thou art mine and I am thine And I will clothe thee
in my clothes, and give thee my sword and my bow, and so shall
my spirit be added to thy spirit, and thou shalt be as the King's
son and the eagle of the Lord, in the eyes of the people

Takes off striped coat, or wide-sleeved tunic

DAVID But can I do this thing?

JONATHAN Yea! That all men know thou art as the King's son in
the world For the eagle hath gold in his feathers and the young
lion is bright So shall David be seen in Israel

*DAVID slowly pulls off his loose robe, a heidsman's tunic cut
off at the knee JONATHAN takes off his sleeveless shirt, and is
seen in his leather loin-strap From his upper arm he takes a
metal bracelet*

JONATHAN Even all my garments thou shalt take, even the armlet
that should not leave me till I die And thou shalt wear it for
ever And thy garments will I take upon me, so the honour shall
be mine

*DAVID pulls off his shirt, and is seen in the leather loin-strap,
JONATHAN puts his bracelet on DAVID's arm, then his own shirt
over DAVID's head, and holds up his coloured robe DAVID robed,
JONATHAN brings him a coloured head-kerchief and girdle, then
his sword and his bow and quiver and shoes JONATHAN puts on
DAVID's clothes*

DAVID How do I appear?

JONATHAN Even as the eagle in his own plumage It is said, David,
that thou art anointed of Samuel, before the Lord Is it so?

DAVID Yea

JONATHAN Thou hast the sun within thee, who shall deny
thee?

DAVID Why speakest thou sadly, Jonathan, brother?

JONATHAN Lest thou go beyond me, and be lost to me

DAVID Lord! Lord! Let not my soul part from the soul of Jonathan
for ever, for all that man can be to man on earth, is he to me

JONATHAN Would I could give thee more!

SAUL (*entering*) Yea! And which now is the King's son, and which the shepherd?

DAVID Thy son would have it so, O King

JONATHAN It is well, Father! Shall not the leader shine forth?

SAUL Even so And the young King-bird shall moult his feathers in the same hour

JONATHAN The robe of David honours the shoulders of Jonathan

SAUL Art thou ready, thou brave young man?

DAVID I am ready, O King

SAUL The host is in array, awaiting thy coming

DAVID I will come where the King leads me

SAUL (to JONATHAN) Put another robe upon thee, ere thou come forth

JONATHAN I will not come forth (*Turns abruptly*)

DAVID *follows SAUL from the tent—loud shouting of the army*

JONATHAN (*alone*) If the Lord hath anointed him for the kingdom, Jonathan will not quarrel with the Lord My father knoweth Yet Saul will strain against God The Lord hath not revealed Himself unto me save that once I saw the glisten in my father that now I see in David My life belongs to my father, but my soul is David's I cannot help it The Lord sees fit to split me between King and King-to-be, and already I am torn asunder as between two wild horses straining opposite ways Yet my blood is my father's And my soul is David's And the right hand and the left hand are strangers on me

CURTAIN

SCENE IX

Outside the courtyard of SAUL's house in Gilgal Doorway of courtyard seen open MAIDENS running forth with instruments of music Men-servants gazing into the distance People waiting

MAIDENS Lu-lu-a-li-lu-lu-lu! Lu-lu-lu-li-a-li-lu-lu! A-li-lu-lu-lu-a-li-lu! Lu-al-li-lu! Lu-al-li-lu-a!

MERAB Out of Judah Saul comes in!

MICHAL David slew the Philistine

MERAB AND HER MAIDENS Out of Judah Saul comes in'

MICHAL AND HER MAIDENS David slew the Philistine

ALL (*repeat several times*) A-li-lu-lu' A-li-lu-lu-lu' Lu' lu' lu'
lu' li' lu' lu' a' li' lu' lu' lu' lu'

MERAB All the Philistine has fled

MICHAL By the roadside fell their dead

MERAB Wounded fell down in the path

MICHAL Beyond Ekron unto Gath

MERAB AND MAIDENS All the Philistine has fled

MICHAL AND MAIDENS By the roadside fell their dead

MERAB AND MAIDENS Wounded fell down in the path

MICHAL AND MAIDENS Beyond Ekron unto Gath

ALL (*repeat continuously*) Lu-li-lu-lu-lu' Lu-lu-li-a-lu-lu' Li-a-li-lu-
lu-lu' Lu' Lu' Lu' Lu' A' li' Lu' Lu' Lu' Lu' Li' A' Lu' Lu'
Li' Lu' A' Li' Lu' Lu' Lu' Lu' u'

MERAB Saul in thousands slew their men'

MICHAL David slew his thousands ten'

MERAB AND MAIDENS Saul in thousands slew their men'

MICHAL AND MAIDENS David slew his thousands ten' Oh' Lu' Lu'
Lu' Lu' Lu' Lu' A' Li' Lu' Lu' Lu'

ALL Lu' Lu' Lu' Li' Lu' Lu' Lu'—A-li-lu-lu-a-li-lu-lu' Lu-a-li-lu-
lu-lu' Lu-lu-lu'

MERAB Out of Judah Saul comes in

MICHAL David slew the Philistine

MERAB AND MAIDENS Out of Judah Saul comes in

MICHAL AND MAIDENS David slew the Philistine

ALL Lu-li-lu-lu-lu-li-lu' Lu-lu-a-li-lu-lu-lu'

They continue the repetition of the simple rhymes, as SAUL draws near, followed by DAVID, JONATHAN, ABNER and the armed men The MAIDENS keep up the singing, all the time dancing, MERAB with her MAIDENS on one side of the men, MICHAL and her MAIDENS on the other, singing loudly back and forth all the time The men pass slowly into the gate, without response The MAIDENS run peering at the spoil the servant-men are carrying in All pass in at the gate

SCENE X

*Courtyard of SAUL's house in Gilgal Confusion of people and men
just come in—MAIDENS still singing outside*

ABNER The King is returned to his own house once more full of
victory When shall we slay the sacrifice?

SAUL To-night I will slay a bull calf for my house, and an ox will
I sacrifice for my household And for the men will we slay oxen
and sheep and goats

ABNER Yea! For this is a great day before the Lord in Israel! And
we will sprinkle the spoil with the sacrifice

SAUL Hast thou heard the song of the women? Nay, hearest thou?
Hark! (*In the distance is heard the singing*)

MERAB Saul in thousands slew their men

MICHAL David slew his thousands ten

ALL Lu-lu-lu-li-lu-lu-a! A-li-lu-lu-a-li-lu!

ABNER Ay!

SAUL May such mouths be bruised!

ABNER Nay! Nay! King Saul! In this hour!

SAUL In this instant! They have ascribed to David ten thousands,
and to me they have ascribed but thousands And what can he
have more, but the Kingdom?

ABNER Nay, nay, O Saul! It is but the light words of women Ay,
let them sing! For as vain women they fancy naught but that
head of Goliath, with the round stone sunken in But the King
is King

SAUL Shall that shepherd oust me, even from the mouths of the
maidens?

ABNER Nay, this is folly, and less than kingly

MICHAL (*followed by MERAB—running round the KING with their
tambourines*) Lu-li-lu-lu-a-li-lu! A-li-lu-lu-a-li-lu-lu-lu!

SAUL Away!

MERAB AND MICHAL Lu-lu-lu-lu! Saul, the King! Lu-lu-lu-lu-al-li-
lu-lu! Saul! Saul! Lu-lu-lu! Saul! Saul! Lu-lu-lu!

SAUL Peace, I say!

Exit SAUL, passing into house

MERAB AND MICHAL Jonathan and David Lu-lu-lu! Here they come,
the friendly two! Lu-lu-lu-lu-a-li-lu! Lu-lu-a-li-lu-lu-lu!

MERAB Jonathan is kingly bred

MICHAL David took Goliath's head

BOTH Jonathan and David! Lu-lu-lu!—a! Here they come, the
loving two-a!

MICHAL (to DAVID) Where is the giant's head?

DAVID It is in Jerusalem of Judah, O Maiden

MICHAL Why did you not bring it here, that we might see it?

DAVID I am of Judah, and they would have it there

MICHAL But Saul is King, and could have it where he would

DAVID Saul would leave it in Jerusalem

MICHAL And the armour, and the greaves of brass, and the shield,
and the sword? The coat of brass that weighs five thousand
shekels Where are these? I want to see them, O David!

DAVID The armour is in my father's house, and in Jerusalem The
sword lies before the Lord in Ramah, with Samuel, O Maiden!

MICHAL Why take it to Samuel? Do you not know my name, O
David!

DAVID You are Michal

MICHAL I am she And this is Merab! Look at him, Merab, and see
if you like him Is it true, O my brother Jonathan, that the King
will give Merab his daughter to the slayer of the Philistine?

JONATHAN He hath said so

MICHAL To us he has not said one word O Merab! Look at thy
man! How liketh thou him?

MERAB I will not look at him yet

MICHAL Oh, thou! Thou hast spied out every hair in his beard Is
he not fox-red? I think the beard of a man should be raven-black
O Merab, thy David is very ruddy

MERAB Nay! He is not yet mine, nor I his

MICHAL Thou wouldst it were so! Alas! Thou art hasty and before-
hand with the red youth! Shame on thee, that art a King's
daughter

MERAB Nay, now, I have said naught

MICHAL Thou shouldst have said somewhat, to cover thy un-
maidenly longing—O David, this Merab sighs in her soul for you
How like you her?

DAVID She is fair and a modest maiden

MICHAL As am not I! Oh, but I am Saul's very daughter, and a hawk that soars kinghigh And what has David brought, to lay before Merab?

DAVID All I have is laid before the King

MICHAL But naught of the Philistine Goliath! All that spoil you took home to your father's house, as the fox brings his prey to his own hole Ah, David, the wary one!

MERAB It was his own! Where should he take it, but to his father's house!

MICHAL Is not the King his father! Why should he not bring it here? Is Merab not worth the bride-money?

JONATHAN Oh, peace! Thou art all mischief, Michal Thou shouldst be married to a Philistine, for his undoing

MICHAL Ayee! This David has come back to trouble us! Why didst not *thou* slay the Philistine, Jonathan?

JONATHAN Peace! Let us go in, David! These maidens are too forward My father did never succeed in ruling his household of women

MICHAL Ayee! His household of women! Thou, Jonathan! Go in, David! They shall not put poison in your meat

As DAVID and JONATHAN *depart she sings*

Empty-handed David came!

Merab saw him full of shame!

Lu-lu-lu-lu-lu-li-lu! A-li-lu-a! A-li-lu!

Empty-handed David came!

Merab saw him full of shame!

A-li-lu-lu! A-li-lu-li! Li-lu-li-lu-a!

(To MERAB) So he has come!

MERAB Even so! Yet his brow says *Have a care!*

MICHAL Have a care, Merab! Have a care, David! Have a care, Michal! Have a care, Jonathan! Have a care, King Saul! I do not like his brow, it is too studied

MERAB Nay, it is manly, and grave

MICHAL Ayee! Ayee! He did not laugh He did not once laugh It will not be well, Merab!

MERAB What will not be well?

MICHAL The King will not give thee to him

MERAB But the King hath spoken

MICHAL I have read the brow of Saul, and it was black I have

looked at David's brow, and it was heavy and secret The King
will not give thee to David, Merab I know it, I know it

MERAB A King should keep his word!

MICHAL What! Art thou hot with anger against thy father, lest
he give thee not to this shepherd boy! David hath cast a spell
on Merab! The ruddy herdsman out of Judah has thrown a net
over the King's daughter! Oh, poor quail! poor partridge!

MERAB I am not caught! I am not!

MICHAL Thou art caught! And not by some chieftain, nor by some
owner of great herds But by a sheep-tending boy! Oh, fie!

MERAB Nay, I do not want him

MICHAL Yea, thou dost And if some man of great substance came,
and my father would give thee to him, thou wouldst cry Nay!
Nay! Nay! I am David's!

MERAB Never would I cry this and that thou sayest For I am not
his —And am I not first daughter of the King!

MICHAL Thou waitest and pantest after that red David And he will
climb high in the sight of Israel, upon the mound of Merab I
tell thee, he is a climber who would climb above our heads

MICHAL Above my head he shall not climb

MICHAL Empty-handed David came!

Merab saw him full of shame!

Lu-li-lu-li! Lu-li-lu-lu-li! A-li-lu-lu!

CURTAIN

SCENE XI

Room in KING's house at Gilgal Bare adobe room, mats on the floor
SAUL, ABNER and ADRIEL reclining around a little open hearth

SAUL And how is the slayer of Goliath looked upon, in Gilgal?

ABNER Yea! he is a wise young man, he brings no disfavour upon
himself

SAUL May Baal finish him! And how looks he on the King's
daughter? Does he eye Merab as a fox eyes a young lamb?

ABNER Nay, he is wise, a young man full of discretion, watching
well his steps

SAUL Ay is he! Smooth-faced and soft-footed, as Joseph in the house of Pharaoh! I tell you, I like not this weasel

ABNER Nay, he is no enemy of the King His eyes are clear, with the light of the Lord God But he is alone and shy, as a rude young shepherd

SAUL Thou art his uncle, surely I tell you, I will send him back to Bethlehem, to the sheep-cotes

ABNER He is grown beyond the sheep-cotes, O King! And wilt thou send him back into Judah, while the giant's head still blackens above the gates of Jerusalem, and David is darling of all Judea, in the hearts of the men of Judah? Better keep him here, where the King alone can honour him

SAUL I know him! Should I send him away, he will have them name him King in Judah, and Samuel will give testimony Yea, when he carried the sword of the giant before Samuel in Ramah, did not Samuel bless him in the sight of all men, saying Thou art chosen of the Lord out of Israel!

ABNER If it be so, O King, we cannot put back the sun in heaven Yet is David faithful servant to the King, and full of love for Jonathan I find in him no presumption

SAUL My household is against me Ah, this is the curse upon me! My children love my chief enemy, him who hath supplanted me before the Lord Yea, my children pay court to David, and my daughters languish for him But he shall not rise upon me I say he shall not! Nor shall he marry my elder daughter Merab Wellah, and he shall not

ABNER Yet Saul has given his word

SAUL And Saul shall take it back What man should keep his word with a supplanter? Abner, have we not appointed him captain over a thousand? Captain over a thousand in the army of Saul shall he be Oh yes! And to-morrow I will say to him, I will even say it again *Behold Merab, my elder daughter, her will I give thee to wife only be thou valiant for me, and fight the Lord's battles* And then he shall go forth with his thousand again, quickly, against the Philistine Let not my hand be upon him, but let the hand of the Philistine be upon him

ABNER But if the Lord be with him, and he fall not, but come back once more with spoil, wilt thou then withhold the hand of thy daughter Merab from him?

SAUL He shall not have her! Nay, I know not When the day comes that he returns back to this house, then Saul will answer him We will not tempt the Thunderer

ADRIEL I have it sure, from Eliah his brother, that David was anointed by Samuel to be King over Israel, secretly, in the house of his father Jesse And Eliah liketh not the youngster, saying he was ever heady, naughty-hearted, full of a youngling's naughty pride, and the conceit of the father's favourite Now the tale is out in Judah, and many would have him King, saying Why should Judah look to a King out of Benjamin? Is there no horn-anointed among the men of Judah?

SAUL So is it! So is it!—To-morrow he shall go forth with his men, and the hand of the Philistine shall be upon him I will not lift my hand upon him, for fear of the Dark! Yet where is he now? What is he conniving at this moment, in the house of Saul? Go see what he is about, O Adriel!

Exit ADRIEL

ABNER It is a bad thing, O Saul, to let this jealous worm eat into a King's heart, that always was noble!

SAUL I cannot help it The worm is there And since the women sang—nay, in all the cities they sang the same—*Saul hath slain his thousands, but David hath slain his tens of thousands*, it gnaws me, Abner, and I feel I am no longer King in the sight of the Lord

ABNER Canst thou not speak with the Morning Wind? And if the Lord of Days have chosen David to be king over Israel after thee, canst thou not answer the great Wish of the Heavens, saying *It is well!*?

SAUL I cannot! I cannot deny my house, and my blood! I cannot cast down my own seed, for the seed of Jesse to sprout I cannot! Wellah, and I will not! Speak not to me of this!

ABNER Yet wert *thou* chosen of God! And always hast thou been a man of the bright horn

SAUL Yea, and am I brought to ~~this~~ pass! Yea, and must I cut myself off? Almost will I rather be a man of Belial, and call on Baal Surely Astaroth were better to me For I have kept the faith, yet must I cut myself off! Wellah, is there no other strength?

ABNER I know not Thou knowest, who hast heard the thunder and hast felt the Thunderer

SAUL I hear It no more, for It hath closed Its lips to me But other voices hear I in the night—other voices!

Enter ADRIEL

SAUL Well, and where is he?

ADRIEL He is sitting in the house of Jonathan, and they make music together, so the women listen

SAUL Ah! And sings the bird of Bethlehem? What songs now?

ADRIEL Even to the Lord *How excellent is thy name in all the earth* And men and women listen diligently, to learn as it droppeth from his mouth And Jonathan, for very love, writes it down

SAUL Nay, canst thou not remember?

ADRIEL I cannot, O King Hark!

A man is heard in the courtyard, singing loud and manly, from Psalm viii

Voice of singer What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?

For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour

Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands, Thou hast put all things under his feet

All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field,

The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas

O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!

SAUL listens moodily

SAUL I hear him! Yea, they sing after him! He will set all Israel singing after him, and all men in all lands All the world will sing what he sings And I shall be dumb Yea, I shall be dumb, and the lips of my house will be dust! What, am I naught, and set at naught! What do I know? Shall I go down into the grave silenced, and like one mute with ignorance? Ha! Ha! There are wells in the desert that go deep And even there we water the sheep, when our faces are blackened with drought Hath Saul no sight into the unseen? Ha, look! look down the deep well, how the black water is troubled—Yea, and I see death, death, death! I see a sword through my body, and the body of Jonathan gaping wounds, and my son Abinadab, and my son Melchishua, and my son Ishbosheth lying in blood Nay, I see the small pale issue of

my house creeping on broken feet, as a lamed worm Yea, yea, what an end! And the seed of David rising up and covering the earth, many, with a glory about them, and the wind of the Lord in their hair Nay, then they wheel against the sun, and are dark, like the locusts sweeping in heaven, like the pillars of locusts moving, yea, as a tall, dark cloud upon the land Till they drop in drops of blood, like thunder-rain, and the land is red Then they turn again into the glory of the Lord Yea, as a flight of birds down all the ages, now shedding sun and the gleam of God, now shedding shadow and the fall of blood, now as quails chirping in the spring, now as the locust pillars of cloud, as death upon the land And they thicken and thicken, till the world's air grates and clicks as with the wings of locusts And man is his own devourer, and the Deep turns away, without wish to look on him further So the earth is a desert, and manless, yet covered with houses and iron Yea, David, the pits are digged even under the feet of thy God, and thy God shall fall in Oh, their God shall fall into the pit, that the sons of David have digged Oh, men can dig a pit for the most high God, and He falls in—as they say of the huge elephant in the lands beyond the desert And the world shall be Godless, there shall no God walk on the mountains, no whirlwind shall stir like a heart in the deeps of the blue firmament And God shall be gone from the world Only men there shall be, in myriads, like locusts, clicking and grating upon one another, and crawling over one another The smell of them shall be as smoke, but it shall rise up into the air, without finding the nostrils of God For God shall be gone! gone! gone! And men shall inherit the earth! Yea, like locusts and whirring on wings like locusts To this the seed of David shall come, and this is their triumph, when the house of Saul has been swept up, long, long ago into the body of God Godless the world! Godless the men in myriads even like locusts No God in the air! No God on the mountains! Even out of the deeps of the sky they lured Him, into their pit! So the world is empty of God, empty, empty, like a blown egg-shell bunged with wax and floating meaningless God shall fall Himself into the pit these men shall dig for Him! Ha! Ha! O David's Almighty, even He knows not the depth of the dark wells in the desert where men may still water their flocks! Ha! Ha! Lord God of Judah, thou peepest not down the

pit where the black water twinkles Ha-ha! Saul peeps and sees the fate that wells up from below! Ha! Lo! Death and blood, what is this Almighty that sees not the pits digged for Him by the children of men? Ha! Ha! saith Saul Look in the black mirror! Ha!

ABNER It is not well, O King

SAUL Ha! It is very well! It is very well Let them lay their trap for his Lord For his Lord will fall into it Aha! Aha! Give them length of days I do not ask it

ABNER My lord, the darkness is over your heart

SAUL And over my eyes! Ha! And on the swim of the dark are visions What? Are the demons not under the works of God, as worms are under the roots of the vine? Look! (*Stares transfixed*)

ABNER (*to ADRIEL*) Go quickly and bring Jonathan, and David, for the Kings is prophesying with the spirit of the under-earth

Exit ADRIEL

SAUL The room is full of demons! I have known it filled with the breath of Might The glisten of the dark, old movers that first got the world into shape They say the god was once as a beetle, but vast and dark And he rolled the earth into a ball, and laid his seed in it Then he crept clicking away to hide for ever, while the earth brought forth after him He went down a deep pit The gods do not die They go down a deep pit, and live on at the bottom of oblivion And when a man staggers, he stumbles and falls backwards down the pit—down the pit, down through oblivion after oblivion, where the gods of the past live on And they laugh, and eat his soul And the time will come when even the God of David will fall down the endless pit, till He passes the place where the serpent lies living under oblivion, on to where the Beetle of the Beginning lives under many layers of dark I see it! Aha! I see the Beetle clambering upon Him, Who was the Lord of Hosts

ABNER I cannot hear thee, O King I would e'en be deaf in this hour Peace! I bid thee! Peace!

SAUL What? Did someone speak within the shadow? Come thou forth then from the shadow, if thou hast aught to say

ABNER I say Peace! Peace, thou! Say thou no more!

SAUL What? Peace! saith the voice? And what is peace? Hath the Beetle of the Beginning peace, under many layers of oblivion? Or the great serpent coiled for ever, is he coiled upon his own peace?

Enter JONATHAN, DAVID, and MEN

SAUL (*continuing*) I tell you, till the end of time, unrest will come upon the serpent of serpents, and he will lift his head and hiss against the children of men—thus will he hiss! (*SAUL hisses*) Hiss! Hiss! and he will strike the children of men—thus—

SAUL strikes as a serpent, and with his javelin

JONATHAN Father, shall we sound music?

SAUL Father! Who is father? Know ye not, the vast, dark, shining beetle was the first father, who laid his eggs in a dead ball of the dust of forgotten gods? And out of the egg the serpent of gold, who was great Lord of Life, came forth

JONATHAN (*to DAVID*) Now sing, that peace may come back upon us

DAVID If he heed me (*Sings Psalm viii*)

SAUL meanwhile raves—then sinks into gloom, staring fixedly

SAUL And the serpent was golden with life But he said to himself I will lay an egg So he laid the egg of his own undoing And the Great White Bird came forth Some say a dove, some say an eagle, some say a swan, some say a goose—all say a bird And the serpent of the sun's life turned dark, as all the gods turn dark Yea, and the Great White Bird beat wings in the firmament, so the dragon slid into a hole, the serpent crawled out of sight, down to the oblivion of oblivion, yet above the oblivion of the Beetle

DAVID meanwhile sings

SAUL (*striking with his hands as if at a wasp*) Na-a! But what is this sound that comes like a hornet at my ears, and will not let me prophesy! Away! Away!

JONATHAN My Father, it is a new song to sing

SAUL What art thou, Jonathan, thy father's enemy?

JONATHAN Listen to the new song, Father

SAUL What? (*Hearkens a moment*) I will not hear it! What! I say I will not hear it! Trouble me not, nor stop the dark fountain of my prophecy! I will not hearken! (*Listens*)

DAVID (*singing*) When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained

SAUL What! art thou there, thou brown hornet, thou stealer of life's honey! What, shalt thou stay in my sight! (*Suddenly hurls his javelin at DAVID DAVID leaps aside*)

JONATHAN My Father, this shall not be!

SAUL What! art thou there? Bring me here my dart

JONATHAN (*picking up the javelin*) Look then at the hole in the wall! Is not that a reproach against the house of the King for ever? (*Gives the javelin to SAUL*)

SAUL *sinks into moody silence, staring* DAVID *begins to sing very softly*

DAVID (*singing*) O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! Who has set thy glory above the heavens

SAUL *very softly, with the soft, swift suddenness of a great cat, leaps round and hurls the javelin again* DAVID *as swiftly leaps aside*

SAUL I will smite David even to the wall

ABNER Go hence, David! Swiftly hence!

JONATHAN Twice, Father!

Exit DAVID

ABNER (*seizing javelin*) The evil spirits upon thee have done this
O Saul! They have not prevailed

SAUL Have I pierced him? Is he down with the dead? Can we lay him in the sides of the pit?

ABNER He is not dead! He is gone forth

SAUL (*wearily*) Gone forth! Ay! He is gone forth!—What, did I seek to slay him?

JONATHAN Yea, twice

SAUL I was out of myself I was then beside myself

ABNER Yea, the evil spirits were upon thee

SAUL Tell him, O Jonathan, Saul seeks not his life Nay! Nay!

Do I not love him, even as thou dost, but more, even as a father!

O David! David! I have loved thee Oh, I have loved thee and the Lord in thee—And now the evil days have come upon me, and I have thrown the dart against thee, and against the Lord I am a man given over to trouble, and tossed between two winds Lo, how can I walk before the faces of men! (*Covers his face with his mantle*)

ABNER The evil spirits have left him Peace comes with sorrow

JONATHAN And only then

SAUL Bring David hither to me, for I will make my peace with him, for my heart is very sore

JONATHAN Verily, shall it be peace?

SAUL Yea! For I fear the Night

Exit JONATHAN

Surely now will David publish it in Judah *Saul hath lifted his hand to slay me*

ABNER He will not publish it in Judah

SAUL And wherefore not? Is he not as the apple of their eyes to the men of Judah, who love not overmuch the tribe of Benjamin?

ABNER But David is the King's man

SAUL Ah, would it were verily so

Enter JONATHAN and DAVID

DAVID The Lord strengthen the King!

SAUL Ah, David, my son, come, and come in peace For my hands are bare and my heart is washed and my eyes are no longer deluded May the Lord be with thee, David, and hold it not against me, what I have done Spirits of the earth possess me, and I am not my own Thou shalt not cherish it in thy heart, what Saul did against thee, in the season of his bewilderment?

DAVID Naught has the King done against me And the heart of thy servant knoweth no ill

SAUL Hatest thou me not, David?

DAVID Let the word be unspoken, my Father!

SAUL Ah, David! David! Why can I not love thee untroubled?—But I will right the wrong—Thou shalt henceforth be captain of the thousand of Hebron, and dwell in thine own house, by the men And behold, Merab, my elder daughter, I will give thee to wife

DAVID Who am I, and what is my life, or my father's family in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the King?

SAUL Nay, thou art of mine own heart, and the Lord is thy great strength Only be valiant for me, and fight the Lord's battles

DAVID All my life is the King's, and my strength is to serve

SAUL It shall be well And with thy thousand shalt thou succour Israel

SCENE XIII

The well at Gilgal MAIDENS coming with water-jars Two HERDSMEN filling the trough—one below, at the water, one on the steps They swing the leather bucket back and forth with a rough chant the lower shepherd swinging the load to the upper, who swings it to the trough, and hands it back DAVID approaching

1ST HERDSMAN Ya' David missed her

2ND HERDSMAN Let him get her sister—Oh' Oh-oh-h'

1ST HERDSMAN Ya' David missed her

2ND HERDSMAN Let him get her sister—Oh-h-h-h' (*Continue several times*)

1ST MAIDEN How long, O Herdsman'

2ND HERDSMAN Ho-o-o' Enough'

1ST HERDSMAN (*coming up*) Ya' David missed her'

MAIDENS run away from him

1ST MAIDEN Ho, thou' Seest thou not David?

1ST HERDSMAN Yea, he is there' Ho' David' And hast thou missed her?

MAIDENS laugh

DAVID What sayest thou, O Man?

1ST HERDSMAN Thou hast missed her—say'—am I not right?

DAVID And whom have I missed?

1ST HERDSMAN Wellah' And knowest thou not?

DAVID Nay'

1ST HERDSMAN Wellah' But Merab, the King's elder daughter' Wellah' We feasted her week half a moon ago, whilst you and your men were gone forth against the Philistines Wellah, man, and didst thou not know?

DAVID Sayest thou so? •

1ST HERDSMAN Wellah' And is it not so? Say, Maidens, hath not Adriel the Meholathite got Merab, Saul's daughter, to wife? And hath he not spent his week with her? Wellah, thou art ousted from that bed, O David

DAVID And hath the King given his daughter Merab unto Adriel

the Meholathite! Wellah, shall he not do as he choose, with his own?

1ST HERDSMAN Ay, wellah, shall he! But thou wert promised And in thy stead, another hath gone in unto her! Is it not so, O Maidens? Sleeps not Merab in the tent of Adriel the Meholathite?

1ST MAIDEN Yea, the King hath married her to the man

DAVID And sings she as she shakes his butter-skin?

1ST MAIDEN Nay, as yet she sings not But if David sits here beneath the tree, she will come with her jar Nay, is that not Adriel the Meholathite himself, coming forth? O Herdsman, drive not the cattle as yet to the drinking troughs! (*Goes down and fills her pitcher*)

2ND MAIDEN Will David sit awhile beneath the tree?

DAVID Yea!

2ND MAIDEN Then shall Michal, daughter of Saul, come hither with her water-jar! Is it well, O David?

DAVID Yea, it is very well

MAIDEN *goes down with her pitcher*

ADRIEL Ha, David! And art thou returned? I have not seen thee before the King

DAVID I returned but yesterday And I saw the King at the dawn Now art thou become a great man in Israel, O Adriel, and son-in-law to the King How fareth Merab in the tents of the Meholathite?

ADRIEL Yea, and blithely And to-morrow even in the early day will I set her on an ass, and we will get us to my father's house For he is old, and the charge of his possessions is heavy upon him, and he fain would see his daughter Merab, who shall bring him sons—sons to gladden him And she shall have her hand-maidens about her, and her store-barns of wool, and corn, and clotted figs, and bunches of raisins, all her wealth she shall see in store!

DAVID May she live content, and bring thee sons, even males of worth

ADRIEL The Lord grant it! And thou 'hast come home once more with spoil! How thou chastenest the Philistine! Yea, and behold, the King hath delight in thee, and all his servants love thee! Lo! I am the King's son-in-law, of Merab Now, therefore, be thou also the King's son-in-law, for there is yet a daughter!

DAVID Seemeth it to you a light thing, to be the King's son-in-law, seeing that I am a poor man, and lightly esteemed?

ADRIEL By my beard, the King delighteth in thee, and all his servants love thee There is no man in Israel more fit to take a daughter of the King

DAVID Yea, there be men of mighty substance such as thou, whose flocks have not been counted, and who send men-at-arms pricking with iron lance-points, to the King's service But what have I, save the bare hands and heart of a faithful servant?

ADRIEL Nay, thy name is high among men But lo! here cometh Saul, as he hath promised He is coming out to my tents I will go forward to bring him in Come thou?

DAVID Nay! Leave me here

Exit ADRIEL

1ST HERDSMAN I have heard the mouth of Adriel, O David! Surely he is the King's listener

DAVID And thou! Who made *thee* a listener?

1ST HERDSMAN Nay, I must guard the water-troughs till the cattle have drunk Adriel hath flocks and men-servants, but David hath the Lord, and the hearts of all Israel! Better a brave and bright man, with a face that shines to the heart, than a great owner of troops and herds, who struts with arms akimbo As I plant this driving-stick in the soft earth, so hath the Lord planted David in the heart of Israel I say Stick, may thou flourish! May thou bud and blossom and be a great tree For thou art not as the javelin of Saul, levelled at David's bosom

DAVID Peace! Saul cometh

1ST HERDSMAN Wellah! And I will go down to the water (*Goes to the well*)

DAVID The Lord strengthen the King

SAUL Art thou my son, David? Yea, David, have they told thee, I have married my daughter Merab unto Adriel the Meholathite, even to him who stands here?

DAVID Yea, O Saul! They told me the King's pleasure May the Lord bless thy house for ever!

SAUL Have I not promised my daughter unto thee? But my servants tell me the heart of Michal goes forth wishful unto David Say now, is she fair in thine eyes?

DAVID Yea! Yea, O King, yea!

SAUL When the new moon shows her tender horns above the west,
thou shalt this day be my son-in-law in one of the twain

DAVID Let thy servant but serve the King!

SAUL Yea, an thou serve me, it shall be on the day of the new moon

DAVID Yea, will I serve without fail

SAUL So be it!

Exit with ADRIEL

HERDSMAN (*coming up*) Now is David the richest man in Israel—
in promises! Wilt thou not sell me a King's promise, for this my camel-stick?

DAVID It is well

HERDSMAN Sayest thou? Then it is a bargain? Wellah! Take my stick It is worth the word of a King

DAVID Peace!

HERDSMAN Thou meanest war!

DAVID How?

HERDSMAN If thou get her, it is war If thou get her not, it is more war Sayest thou peace?

MAIDENS (*running*) Oh, master David, hath Saul passed with Adriel?

HERDSMAN They have passed, letting fall promises as the goat droppeth pills

DAVID Peace, O Man!

MAIDEN Oh, master David, shall Michal come forth to fill her water-jar? For Merab is setting meats before the King, in the booth of Adriel Oh, David, shall Michal bring her jar to the well?

HERDSMAN Ay, wellah, shall she! And I will hold back the cattle this little while, for I hear their voices

Exit HERDSMAN

DAVID Run back quickly and let her come

Exit MAIDEN

DAVID (*alone*) Lord! dost Thou send this maiden to me? My entrails strain in me, for Michal, daughter of Saul Lord God of my Salvation, my wanting of this maiden is next to my wanting Thee My body is a strung bow Lord, let me shoot mine arrow unto this mark Thou fillest me with desire as with thunder, Thy lightning is in my loins, and my breast like a cloud leans forward for her Lord! Lord! Thy left hand is about her middle, and Thy

ACT I

SCENE I

The kitchen of a miner's small cottage On the left is the fireplace, with a deep, full red fire At the back is a white-curtained window, and beside it the outer door of the room On the right, two white wooden stairs intrude into the kitchen below the closed stair-foot door On the left, another door

The room is furnished with a chintz-backed sofa under the window, a glass-knobbed painted dresser on the right, and in the centre, toward the fire, a table with a red and blue check tablecloth On one side of the hearth is a wooden rocking-chair, on the other an arm-chair of round staves An unlighted copper-shaded lamp hangs from the raftered ceiling It is dark twilight, with the room full of warm fireglow A woman enters from the outer door As she leaves the door open behind her, the colliery rail can be seen not far from the threshold, and, away back, the headstocks of a pit

The woman is tall and voluptuously built She carries a basket heaped full of washing, which she has just taken from the clotheslines outside Setting down the basket heavily, she feels among the clothes She lifts out a white heap of sheets and other linen, setting it on the table, then she takes a woollen shirt in her hand

MRS HOLROYD (*aloud, to herself*) You know they're not dry even now, though it's been as fine as it has (*She spreads the shirt on the back of her rocking-chair, which she turns to the fire*)

VOICE (*calling from outside*) Well, have you got them dry?

MRS HOLROYD starts up, turns and flings her hand in the direction of the open door, where appears a man in blue overalls, swarfed and greased He carries a dinner-basket

MRS HOLROYD You—you—I don't know what to call you! The idea of shouting at me like that—like the Evil One out of the darkness!

right hand grasps my life So Thou bringest us together in Thy secret self, that it may be fulfilled for Thee in us Lord of the Great Wish, I will not let her go

MICHAL (*entering—covering her chin and throat with her kerchief*)

Wilt thou let me pass to fill my jar, O thou stranger?

DAVID Come, Michal, and I will fill thy jar

She comes forward—he takes her jar and goes down the steps Returning he sets it on the ground at his feet

MICHAL Oh, David! And art thou still unslain?

DAVID As the Lord wills, no man shall slay me And livest thou in thine house lonely, without thy sister Merab?

MICHAL Is thy heart sore in thee, David, that thou hast lost Merab?

Her heart is gentle, and she sighed for thee But e'en she obeyed

DAVID She hath a man of more substance than David And my heart is very glad on her account

MICHAL It is well

DAVID O Michal, didst thou come willingly to the well, when the maiden told thee I waited here?

MICHAL Yea, willingly

DAVID O Michal, my heart runs before me, when it sees thee far off, like one eager to come to his own place Oh, thou with the great eyes of the wilderness, shall my heart leap to thee, and shall thou not say Nay! to it?

MICHAL What said my father, O David, when he passed?

DAVID He said when the new moon showeth her horns in the west, on this day shalt thou surely be my son-in-law of one of the twain

MICHAL Yea, and is thy heart uplifted, to be a King's son-in-law?

DAVID So she be Michal, my body is uplifted like the sail of a ship when the wind arouses

MICHAL Nay, thou art a seeker of honours! Merab had been just as well to thy liking

DAVID Ah, no! Ah! Ah! Merab is gentle and good, and my heart softened with kindness for her, as a man unto a woman But thou art like the rising moon, that maketh the limbs of the mountain glisten O Michal, we twain are upon the hillsides of the Lord, and surely He will bring our strength together!

MICHAL And if the Lord God say thee nay!

DAVID He will not He hath thy life in His left hand, and my life

He holdeth in His right hand And surely He will lay us together
in the secret of His desire, and I shall come unto thee by the
Lord's doing

MICHAL But if He say thee nay, thou wilt let me go

DAVID Thou knowest not the Lord my God The flame He
kindles He will not blow out He is not yea-and-nay ! But my
Lord my God loveth a bright desire and yearneth over a great
Wish, for its fulfilment Oh, the Lord my God is a glowing flame
and He loveth all things that do glow So loves He thee, Michal,
O woman before me, for thou glowest like a young tree in full
flower, with flowers of gold and scarlet, and dark leaves O thou
young pomegranate tree, flowers and fruit together show on thy
body And flame calleth to flame, for flame is the body of God,
like flowers of flame Oh, and God is a great Wish, and a great
Desire, and a pure flame for ever Thou art kindled of the Lord,
O Michal, and He will not let thee go

MICHAL Yet the Lord Himself will not marry me

DAVID I will marry thee, for the Lord hath kindled me unto thee,
and hath said Go to her, for the fruits of the pomegranate are
ripe

MICHAL Will thou not seek me for thyself?

DAVID Yea, for my very self, and for my very self, and for the
Lord's own self in me

MICHAL Ever thou putttest the Lord between me and thee

DAVID The Lord is a sweet wind that fills thy bosom and thy belly
as the sail of a ship, so I see thee sailing delicately towards me,
borne onwards by my Lord

MICHAL Oh, David, would the new moon were come ! For I fear
my father, and I misdoubt his hindrances

DAVID Thinkest thou, he would marry thee away, as Merab?

MICHAL Nay, but thou must make a song, and sing it before all
Israel, that Michal is thine by the King's promise, no man shall
look on her but David

DAVID Yea ! I will make a song And yea, I will not let thee go
Thou shalt come to me as wife, and I will know thee, and thou
shalt lie in my bosom Yea ! As the Lord liveth !

MICHAL And as the Lord liveth, not even my father shall constrain
me, to give me to another man, before the new moon showeth
her horns

DAVID It is well, O Michal! O Michal, wife of David, thou shalt sleep in my tent! In the tent of the men of war, beside the sword of David, Michal sleeps, and the hand of David is upon her hip. He has sealed her with his seal, and Michal of David is her name, and kingdoms shall he bring down to her. Michael of David shall blossom in the land, her name shall blossom in the mouths of soldiers as the rose of Sharon after rain. And men-at-arms shall shout her name, like a victory cry it shall be heard. And she shall be known in the land but as Michal of David, blossom of God, keeper of David's nakedness.

MICHAL They shall not reive me from thee—I see men coming.

DAVID Wilt thou go?

MICHAL I shall call my maidens. So ho! So ho! (*Waves the end of her kerchief*)

HERDSMAN (*entering*) There are two captains, servants of Saul, coming even now from the booths of the Meholathite, where the King is.

MICHAL Yea, let them come, and we will hear the words they put forth.

HERDSMAN And the cattle are being driven round by the apricot garden. They will soon be here.

DAVID In two words we shall have the mind of Saul from these captains.

MAIDENS *enter, running*

MAIDENS O Michal, men are approaching!

MICHAL Fill you your jar, and with one ear let us listen. David stays under the tree.

1ST MAIDEN Stars are in thine eyes, O Michal, like a love night!

2ND MAIDEN Oh! and the perfume of a new-opened flower! What sweetness has she heard?

3RD MAIDEN Oh, say! what words like honey, and like new sweet dates of the Oasis, hath David the singer said to Michal? Oh, that we might have heard!

1ST CAPTAIN (*entering*) David is still at the well?

DAVID Yea, after war and foray, happy is the homely passage at the well?

2ND CAPTAIN Wilt thou return to the King's house with us, and we will tell thee what is toward even the words of Saul concerning thee.

DAVID Say on! For I must in the other way

1ST CAPTAIN The King delighteth in thee more than in any man of Israel For no man layeth low the King's enemies like David, in the land

DAVID Sayest thou so?

1ST CAPTAIN Yea! And when the new moon shows her horns shalt thou be son-in-law to Saul, in his daughter Michal

DAVID As the Lord, and the King, willeth Saul hath said as much to me, even now Yet I am a poor man, and how shall the King at last accept me?

2ND CAPTAIN This too hath Saul considered And he hath said Tell my son David, the King desireth not any bride-money, nay, neither sheep nor oxen nor asses, nor any substance of his But an hundred foreskins of the Philistines shall he bring to the King, to be avenged of his enemies

1ST CAPTAIN So said the King Before the new moon, as she cometh, sets on her first night, shall David bring the foreskins of an hundred Philistines unto Saul And that night shall Saul deliver Michal, his daughter, unto David, and she shall sleep in David's house

2ND CAPTAIN And Israel shall be avenged of her enemies

DAVID Hath the King verily sent this message to me?

1ST CAPTAIN Yea, he hath sent it, and a ring from his own hand Lo! here it is! For said Saul Let David keep this for a pledge between me and him, in this matter And when he returneth, he shall give me my ring again, and the foreskins of the Philistine, and I will give him my daughter Michal to wife

DAVID Yea! Then I must hence, and call my men, and go forth against the Philistine For while the nights are yet moonless, and without point of moon, will I return with the tally

Exit DAVID

2ND CAPTAIN Yea, he is gone on the King's errand

1ST CAPTAIN Let him meet what the King wishes

Exeunt 1ST and 2ND CAPTAINS •

HERDSMAN Yea, I know what ye would have Ye would slay David with the sword of the Philistine For who keeps promise with a dead man! (*MICHAL and MAIDENS edge in*) Hast thou heard, O Michal? David is gone forth against the Philistine For Saul asketh

an hundred foreskins of the enemy as thy bride-money Is it not a tall dowry?

MICHAL Yea! hath my father done this!

HERDSMAN Wellah, hath he! For dead men marry no king's daughters And the spear of some Philistine shall beget death in the body of David Thy father hath made thee dear!

MICHAL Nay, he hath made my name cheap in all Israel

2ND HERDSMAN (*entering*) Run, Maidens! The cattle are coming round the wall, athirst!

MAIDENS (*shouldering their jars*) Away! Away!

Exeunt

CURTAIN

SCENE XIII

A room in DAVID'S house in Gilgal Almost dark DAVID alone, speaking softly an image in a corner

DAVID Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my meditation
Hearken unto the voice of my cry, my King, and my God for
unto thee will I pray

My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord, in the morning
will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up

For thou art not a God that hast pleasure in wickedness neither
shall evil dwell with thee

The foolish shall not stand in thy sight thou hatest all workers
of iniquity

Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing the Lord will abhor
the bloody and deceitful man

But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy
mercy and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy
temple

Lead me, O Lord, in thy righteousness, because of mine enemies,
make thy way straight before my face

For there is no faithfulness in their mouth, their inward part is
very wickedness, their throat is an open sepulchre they
flatter with their tongue

Destroy thou them, O God, let them fall by their own counsels,
cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions, for
they have rebelled against thee

But let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice let them ever
shout for joy, because thou defendest them let them also
that love thy name be joyful in thee

For thou, Lord, wilt bless the righteous, with favour wilt thou
compass him, as with a shield

Pause

Nay Lord, I am Thy anointed, and Thy son With the oil of anoint-
ment hast Thou begotten me Oh, I am twice begotten of Jesse,
and of God! I go forth as a son of God and the Lord is with me
Yet for this they hate me, and Saul seeks to destroy me What
can I do, O Lord, in this pass?

Enter MICHAL, through curtain at side, with tray and lamp

MICHAL The dawn is at hand Art thou not faint with this long
watching before the Lord? Oh! why wilt thou leave thy bed and
thy pleasure of the night, to speak out into the empty, chill hour
towards morning? Come then, eat of the food which I have
brought

DAVID I will not eat now, for my soul still yearns away from me

MICHAL Art thou sick?

DAVID Yea! My soul is sick

MICHAL Why?

DAVID Nay, thou knowest Thy father hates me beyond measure

MICHAL But I love you

DAVID (*takes her hand*) Yea!

MICHAL Is it nothing to you that Michal is your wife and loves
you?

DAVID Verily, it is not nothing But, Michal, what will come to me
at last? From moon to moon Saul's anger waxes I shall lose my
life at last And what good shall I be to thee then?

MICHAL Ah, no! Ah, no! Never shall I see thee dead First thou
shalt see me dead Never, never shall I tear my hair for thee, as a
widow It shall not be If thou go hence, it shall not be into death

DAVID Yet death is near From month to month, since I came back
with the foreskins of the Philistine, and got thee to wife, Saul has
hated me more Michal loves David, and Saul's hate waxes
greater Jonathan loves David, and the King commands Jonathan,

saying There where thou seest him, there shalt thou slay
David

MICHAEL My father is no more a man He is given over entirely to
evil spirits But Jonathan will save thee through it all

DAVID The Lord will save me And Jonathan is dearer to me than
a heart's brother

MICHAEL Think, O husband, if Saul hateth thee, how Michal and
Jonathan, who are children of Saul, do love thee

DAVID Yea, verily ! It is like the rainbow in the sky unto me But,
O Michal, how shall we win through ? I have loved Saul And I
have not it in me to hate him Only his perpetual anger puts on
me a surpassing heaviness, and a weariness, so my flesh wearies
upon my bones

MICHAEL But why ? Why ? Why does it matter to thee ? I love thee,
all the time—Jonathan loves thee—thy men love thee Why does
the frenzy of one distracted man so trouble thee ? Why ? It is
out of all measure

DAVID Nay, he is Saul, and the Lord's anointed And he is King
over all Israel

MICHAEL And what then ? He is no man among men any more Evil
possesses him Why heed him, and wake in the night for him ?

DAVID Because he is the Lord's anointed and one day he will
kill me

MICHAEL He will never kill thee Thou sayest thyself the Lord will
prevent him And if not the Lord, then I will prevent him—for I
am not yet nothing in Gilgal And Jonathan will prevent him
And the captains will prevent him And art thou not also the
Lord's anointed ? And will not the Lord set thee King on the hill
of Zion, in thine own Judah ?

DAVID O Michal ! O Michal ! That the hand of the Lord's anointed
should be lifted against the Lord's anointed ! What can I do ? For
Saul is the Lord's, and I may not even see an enemy in him I
cannot verily ! Yet he seeks to slay me All these months since he
gave thee to me, after I brought the foreskins of the Philistine
for thy dowry, he has hated me more, and sought my life Before
the moon of our marriage was waned away thy father com-
manded his servants, and even Jonathan, to slay David on that
spot where they should find him So Jonathan came to me in
haste and secret, and sent me away into the fields by night and

hid me Yea, before the month of our marriage was finished I had to flee from thee in the night, and leave my place cold

MICHAL But not for long Not for long Jonathan persuaded my father, so he took thee back Even he loved thee again

DAVID Yea, he also loves me! But Saul is a man falling backward down a deep pit, that must e'en clutch what is nearest him, and drag it down along with him

MICHAL But Saul swore As the Lord liveth, David shall not be slain

DAVID Ay, he swore But before two moons were passed his brow was black again And when the season of the year came, that the Kings of the Philistine go forth, I went up against them, and fought The months of the fighting I fought with them, and all the people rejoiced But I saw with a sinking heart the face of Saul blacken, blacken darker with greater hate! Yea, he hath loved me, as the Lord's anointed must love the Lord's anointed But Saul is slipping backward down the pit of despair, away from God And each time he strives to come forth, the loose earth yields beneath his feet, and he slides deeper So the upreach of his love fails him, and the downslide of his hate is great and greater in weight I cannot hate him—nor love him—but, O Michal, I am oppressed with a horror of him

MICHAL Nay, do not dwell on him

DAVID And the year went round its course, and once more there was war with the Philistine And once more we prevailed, in the Lord And once more the armies shouted my name And once more I came home to thee—and thou didst sing And my heart did sing above thee But as a bird hushes when the shadow of the hawk dances upon him from heaven, my heart went hushed under the shadow of Saul And my heart could not sing between thy breasts, as it wanted to, even the heart of a bridegroom For the shadow of Saul was upon it

MICHAL Oh, why do you care? Why do you care? Why do you not love me and never care?

DAVID It is not in me I have been blithe of thy love and thy body But now three days ago, even in the midst of my blitheness, Saul again threw his javelin at me—yea, even in the feast And I am marked among all men And the end draws nigh—For scarce may I leave this house, lest at some corner they slay me

MICHAL What end, then? What end draws nigh?

DAVID I must get me gone I must go into the wilderness

MICHAL (*weeping*) Oh, bitter! Bitter! My joy has been torn from me, as an eagle tears a lamb from the ewe I have no joy in my life, nor in the body of my lord and my husband A serpent is hid in my marriage bed, my joy is venomed Oh, that they had wed me to a man that moved me not, rather than be moved to so much hurt

DAVID Nay, nay! Oh, nay, nay! Between me and thee is no bitterness, and between my body and thy body there is constant joy! Nay, nay! Thou art a flame to me of man's forgetting, and God's presence Nay, nay! Thou shalt not weep for me, for thou art a delight to me, even a delight and a forgetting

MICHAL No! No! Thou leavest me in the night, to make prayers and moaning before the Lord Oh, that thou hadst never married in thy body the daughter of thine enemy!

DAVID Say not so, it is a wrong thing, thou art sweet to me, and all my desire

MICHAL It is not true! Thou moanest, and leavest me in the night, to fall before the Lord

DAVID Yea, trouble is come upon me And I must take my trouble to the Lord But thy breasts are my bliss and my forgetting Oh, do not remember my complaining! But let thyself be sweet to me, and let me sleep among the lilies

MICHAL Thou wilt reproach me again with my father

DAVID Ah, no! Ah, never I reproached thee! But now I can forget, I can forget all but thee, and the blossom of thy sweetness Oh, come with me, and let me know thee For thou art ever again as new to me

MICHAL (*rising as he takes her hand*) Nay, thou wilt turn the bitterness of thy spirit upon me again

DAVID Ah, no! I will not! But the gate of my life can I open to thee again, and the world of bitterness shall be gone under as in a flood

MICHAL And wilt thou not leave me?

DAVID Nay, lift up thy voice no more, for the hour of speech has passed

Exeunt DAVID and MICHAL through curtain at back

SCENE XIV

The same room, unchanged, an hour or so later but the grey light of day A WOMAN-SERVANT comes in *There is a wooden image in a corner*

WOMAN-SERVANT Yea, the lighted lamp, and the food! My lord David hath kept watch again before the Lord, and tears will fall in Michal's bosom, and daiken her heart! Aiee! Aiee! That Saul should so hate the life of David! Surely the evil spirits are strong upon the King

BOY (*entering*) Jonathan, the King's son is below, knocking softly at the door

WOMAN-SERVANT Go! Open swiftly, and make fast again Aiee! Aiee! My lord Jonathan comes too early for a pleasure visit I will see if they sleep

Exit WOMAN-SERVANT through the curtain

Enter JONATHAN JONATHAN stands silent, pensive Goes to window Re-enter WOMAN-SERVANT She starts, seeing JONATHAN —then puts her hand on her mouth

WOMAN-SERVANT O my lord Jonathan! Hush!

JONATHAN They are sleeping still?

WOMAN-SERVANT They are sleeping the marriage sleep David hath even watched before the Lord, in the night But now with Michal he sleeps the marriage sleep in the lands of peace Now grant a son shall come of it, to ease the gnawing of Michal's heart

JONATHAN What gnaws in Michal's heart?

WOMAN-SERVANT Ah, my lord, her love even for David, that will not be appeased If the Giver gave her a son so should her love for David abate, and cease to gnaw in her

JONATHAN But why should it gnaw in her? Hath she not got him, and the joy of him?

WOMAN-SERVANT O Jonathan, she is even as the house of Saul What she hath cannot appease her

JONATHAN What then would she more?

WOMAN-SERVANT She is of the house of Saul, and her very love is pain to her Each cloud that crosses her is another death of her

BLACKMORE I ought to have remembered your tender nerves Shall I come in?

MRS HOLROYD No—not for your impudence But you're late, aren't you?

BLACKMORE It's only just gone six We electricians, you know, we're the gentlemen on a mine ours is gentlemen's work But I'll bet Charles Holroyd was home before four

MRS HOLROYD (*bitterly*) Ay, and gone again before five

BLACKMORE But mine's a lad's job, and I do nothing!—Where's he gone?

MRS HOLROYD (*contemptuously*) Dunno! He'd got a game on somewhere—toffed himself up to the nines, and skedaddled off as brisk as a turkey-cock (*She smirks in front of the mirror hanging on the chimney-piece, in imitation of a man brushing his hair and moustache and admiring himself*)

BLACKMORE Though turkey-cocks aren't brisk as a rule Children playing?

MRS HOLROYD (*recovering herself, coldly*) Yes And they ought to be in

She continues placing the flannel garments before the fire, on the fender and on chair-backs, till the stove is hedged in with a steaming fence, then she takes a sheet in a bundle from the table, and goes up to BLACKMORE, who stands watching her
Here, take hold, and help me fold it

BLACKMORE I shall swarf it up

MRS HOLROYD (*snatching back the sheet*) Oh, you're as tiresome as everybody else

BLACKMORE (*putting down his basket and moving to door on right*) Well, I can soon wash my hands

MRS HOLROYD (*ceasing to flap and fold pillow-cases*) That roller-towel's ever so dirty I'll get you another (*She goes to a drawer in the dresser, and then back toward the scullery, from which comes the sound of water*)

BLACKMORE Why, bless my life, I'm a lot dirtier than the towel I don't want another

MRS HOLROYD (*going into the scullery*) Here you are

BLACKMORE (*softly, now she is near him*) Why did you trouble now?

Pride, you know, pride, nothing else

MRS HOLROYD (*also playful*) It's nothing but decency

love Ah, it is better to let love come and to let it go, even as the winds of the hills blow along the heavens The sun shines, and is dulled, and shines again, it is the day, and its alterings, and after, it is night

JONATHAN David and Michal are asleep?

WOMAN-SERVANT In the marriage sleep Oh, break it not!

JONATHAN The sun will soon rise Lo! this house is upon the wall of the city, and the fields and the hills lie open

WOMAN-SERVANT Shall I bring food to Jonathan?

JONATHAN Nay! Hark! Men are crying at the city's western gate, to open The day is beginning

WOMAN-SERVANT May it bring good to this house!

JONATHAN It is like to bring evil

WOMAN-SERVANT Ah, my lord!

DAVID (*appearing through the curtain at the back*) Jonathan!

JONATHAN David! Thou art awake!

DAVID (*laughing*) Yea! Am I not? Thou art my brother Jonathan, art thou not? (*They embrace*)

JONATHAN O David, the darkness was upon my father in the night, and he hath again bid slay thee Leave not the house Unbar not the door! Watch! And be ready to flee! If armed men stand round the door (*enter MICHAL*), then let down the boy from the window, and send instantly to me I will come with thy men and with mine, and we will withstand the hosts of Saul, if need be

MICHAL Is something new toward?

JONATHAN My father bade his men take David, and slay him in the dawn I must away, lest they see that I have warned thee Farewell, O David!

DAVID Farewell, my brother Jonathan! But I will come down the stair with thee

Exeunt DAVID and JONATHAN

MICHAL Yea! Yea! So sure as it is well between me and him, so sure as we have peace in one another, so sure as we are together—comes this evil wind, and blows upon us! And oh, I am weary of my life, because of it!

WOMAN-SERVANT Alee! Alee! Say not so, O Michal! For thy days are many before thee

MICHAL This time, an they take him, they will surely kill him

WOMAN-SERVANT Sayest thou so! Oh, why, in the Lord's name!

MICHAL I know it! If they take him this time, he is lost

WOMAN-SERVANT Oh, then shall they surely not take him! Oh, but what shall we do?

MICHAL Creep thou on the roof! Let no man see thee. And there he watch if armed men approach the house

Enter DAVID

DAVID There is no one there

MICHAL They will come as the sun comes (*Io WOMAN*) Go thou and watch

WOMAN-SERVANT Verily I will!

Exit WOMAN-SERVANT

MICHAL O David! So sure as it is springtime in me, and my body blossoms like an almond-tree, comes this evil wind upon me, and withers my bud! Oh, how can I bring forth children to thee when the spear of this vexation each time pierces my womb?

DAVID Trouble not thyself, my flower. No wind shall wither thee

MICHAL Oh, but I know. This time, an they take thee, thou shalt lose thy life—And Jonathan will not save thee

DAVID Nay! Be not afraid for me

MICHAL Yes! I am afraid! I am afraid! Ho! Ho, there! (*Claps her hands. Enter BOY. To BOY*) Bring the water-skin for thy master, filled with water. And his pouch with bread—for he goeth on a journey—O David! David! Now take thy cloak, and thy bow, and thy spear, and put on thy shoes. For thou must go! Jonathan cannot avail thee this time

DAVID Nay! Why shall I flee, when the sun is rising?

MICHAL Yea! If thou go not before the sun is here in the morning shalt thou be slain. Oh make ready! Thy shoes! Put them on! (*DAVID reluctantly obeys*) Thy cloak, so they shall not know thee! (*He puts it on*) Thy spear and bow!

Enter BOY

BOY Here is the pouch and the water-flask

MICHAL Run, bring figs and dry curds. Dost thou hear aught at the door?

BOY Naught!

Exit BOY

MICHAL O David, art thou ready! Oh, that thou leavest me!

DAVID I need not go! Yea, to comfort thee, I will go to the place

that Jonathan knoweth of, and thou shalt send thither for me
Or wilt thou——

Re-enter WOMAN-SERVANT

WOMAN-SERVANT O Michal! O David, master! There be men-at-arms approaching, under the wall, and walking by stealth Oh, flee! Oh, flee! for they mean thy life

MICHAL Now must thou go by the window, into the fields I see the sun's first glitter Even for this hour have I kept the new rope ready *(She fastens the rope to a stout stake, and flings the ends from the window To DAVID)* Go! Go! Swiftly be gone!

DAVID I will come again to thee Sooner or later as the Lord liveth, I will take thee again to me, unto my bed and my body

MICHAL Hark! They knock! Ha—a!

Enter BOY

BOY There are men at the door!

MICHAL Go! Call to them! Ask what they want! But touch thou not the door!

DAVID *meanwhile climbs through the window—the stake holds the rope*

WOMAN-SERVANT *(climbing with her hands)* So! So! So! My lord David! So! So! Swing him not against the wall, O spiteful rope So! So! He kicks free! Yea! And God be praised, he is on the ground, looking an instant at his hands So he looks up and departs! Lifts his hand and departs!

MICHAL Is he gone? Draw in the rope, and hide it safe

WOMAN-SERVANT That I will!

Meanwhile MICHAL has flung back the curtain of the recess where the low earthen bank of the bed is seen with skins and covers She takes the wooden image of a god and lays it in the bed, puts a pillow at its head, and draws the bed-cover high over it

MICHAL *(to herself)* Yea, and my house's god which is in my house, shall lie in my husband's place, and the image of my family god, which came of old from my mother's house, shall deceive them For my house has its own gods, yea, from of old, and shall they forsake me?

Enter BOY

BOY They demand to enter The King asketh for David, that he go before the King's presence

MICHAL Go thou, say to them My lord and my master, David is sick in his bed

BOY I will say that

Exit BOY

WOMAN-SERVANT Sit thou nigh the bed And if they still will come up thou shalt say he sleepeth

MICHAL Yea, will I (*Sits by bed*) O god of my household, O god of my mother's house, O god in the bed of David, save me now!

Enter BOY

BOY They will e'en set eyes on my master

MICHAL Stay! Say to them, that their captains shall come up, two only but softly, for my lord David hath been sick these three days, and at last sleepeth

BOY I will tell them

Exit BOY

WOMAN-SERVANT And I too will go bid them hush

Exit WOMAN-SERVANT MICHAL sits in silence Enter two CAPTAINS with the WOMAN-SERVANT

WOMAN-SERVANT There he sleepeth in the bed

MICHAL Sh-h-h!

1ST CAPTAIN I will go even now and tell the King

Exeunt the CAPTAINS after a pause

CURTAIN

Curtain rises after a short time on same scene

WOMAN-SERVANT (*rushing in*) They are coming again down the street, but boldly now

MICHAL Yea! Let them come! By this time is David beyond their reach, in the secret place

WOMAN-SERVANT Oh, and what shall befall thee! Oh!

MICHAL I am the King's daughter Even Saul shall not lift his hand against me Go down thou to the door, and hold the men whilst thou mayst Why should we admit them forthwith? Say that Michal is performing her ablutions

WOMAN-SERVANT Will I not!

Exit WOMAN-SERVANT

MICHAL And shall I strip the bed? They will search the house and the fields Nay, I will leave it, and they shall see how they were

fools O teraphim, O my god of my own house, hinder them and help me O thou my teraphim, watch for me!

Sound of knocking below

VOICE OF SERVANT Ho, ye! Who knocks, in the Lord's name?

VOICE OF CAPTAIN Open! Open ye! In the name of the King

VOICE OF SERVANT What would ye in this house of sickness?

VOICE OF CAPTAIN Open, and thou shalt know

VOICE OF SERVANT I may not open, save Michal bid me

VOICE OF CAPTAIN Then bid Michal bid thee open forthwith

VOICE OF SERVANT O thou captain of the loud shout, surely thou wert here before! Know then, my master is sick, and my mistress performeth her ablutions in the sight of the Lord At this moment may I not open

VOICE OF CAPTAIN An thou open not, it shall cost thee

VOICE OF SERVANT Nay, now, is not my mistress King's daughter, and is not her command laid on me? O Captain, wilt thou hold it against me, who tremble between two terrors?

VOICE OF CAPTAIN Tremble shalt thou, when the terror nips thee
E'en open the door, lest we break it in

VOICE OF SERVANT Oh, what uncouth man is this, that will break down the door of the King's daughter, and she naked at her bath, before the Lord!

VOICE OF CAPTAIN We do but the King's bidding

VOICE OF SERVANT How can that be? What, did the King indeed bid ye break down the door of his daughter's house, and she uncovered in the Lord's sight, at her ablutions?

VOICE OF CAPTAIN Yea! The King bade us bring before him instantly the bed of David, and David upon the bed!

VOICE OF SERVANT Oh, now, what unseemly thing is this! Hath not the King legs long enough? And can he not walk hither on his feet? Oh, send, fetch the King, I pray thee, thou Captain Say, I pray thee, that Michal prays the King come hither

VOICE OF CAPTAIN Word shall be sent Yet open now this door, that the bird escapes me not

VOICE OF SERVANT O Captain! And is my master then a bird? O would he were, even the young eagle, that he might spread wing! O man, hast thou no fear what may befall thee, that thou namest David a bird? O Israel, uncover now thine ear!

VOICE OF CAPTAIN I name him not

VOICE OF SERVANT And what would ye, with this bird my master!

Oh, the Lord forbid that any man should call him a bird!

VOICE OF CAPTAIN We e'en must bring him upon his bed before the King

VOICE OF SERVANT Now what is this! Will the King heal him with mighty spells? Or is David on his sick-bed to be carried before the people, that they may know his plight? What new wonder is this?

VOICE OF CAPTAIN I cannot say — Yet I will wait no longer

MICHAL Open, Maiden! Let them come up

VOICE OF SERVANT Oh, my mistress crieth unto me that I open
Yea, O Michal, I will e'en open to these men For who dare look
aslant at the King's daughter?

Enter CAPTAIN, followed by SOLDIERS

CAPTAIN Is David still in the bed? An he cannot rise will we carry him upon the bed, before the King

MICHAL Now what is this?

CAPTAIN Sleeps he yet? Ho, David, sleepest thou?

2ND SOLDIER We will take up the bed and wake him

3RD SOLDIER He stirs not at all

CAPTAIN (to MICHAL) Yea, rouse him and tell him the King's will

MICHAL I will not rouse him

CAPTAIN (*going to the bed*) Ho, thou! Ho! David! (*He suddenly pulls back the bed-cover*) What is this? (*Sudden loud shrilling laughter from the WOMAN-SERVANT, who flees when the men look round*)

SOLDIERS (*crowding*) We are deceived Ha-ha! It is a man of wood and a goats'-hair bolster! Ha-ha-ha! What husband is this of Michal's?

MICHAL My teraphim, and the god of my house

CAPTAIN Where hast thou hidden David?

MICHAL I have not hidden him

Pause

VOICE OF SAUL (*on the stair*) Why tarry ye here? What! Must the King come on his own errands? (*Enter SAUL*) And are ye here?

MICHAL The Lord strengthen thee, my Father

SAUL Ha! Michal! And can then David not rise from his bed, when the King sendeth for him?

CAPTAIN Lo! O King! Behold the sick man on the bed! We are deceived of Michal

SAUL What is this? (*Flings the image across the room*)

MICHAL Oh, my teraphim! Oh, god of my house! Oh, alas, alas, now will misfortune fall on my house! Oh, woe is! woe is me! (*Kneels before teraphim*)

SAUL Where is David? Why hast thou deceived me?

MICHAL O god of my house, god of my mother's house, visit it not upon me!

SAUL Answer me, or I will slay thee!

MICHAL God of my house, I am slain! I am slain!

SAUL Where is David?

MICHAL O my lord, he is gone, he is gone ere the sun made day

SAUL Yea, thou hast helped him against me

MICHAL (*weeping*) Oh! Oh! He said unto me *Let me go, why shouldst thou make me slay thee, to trouble my face in the sight of men* I could not hinder him, he would have slain me there!

SAUL Why hast thou deceived me so, and sent away mine enemy, that he escaped?

MICHAL (*weeping*) I could not prevent him

SAUL Even when did he go?

MICHAL He rose up before the Lord, in the deep night And then he would away, while no man saw

SAUL Whither is he gone?

MICHAL Verily, and verily, I know not

Pause

SAUL So! He hath escaped me! And my flesh and my blood hath helped mine enemy Woe to you, Michal! Woe to you! Who have helped your father's enemy, who would pull down thy father to the ground Lo! my flesh and my blood rebel against me, and my seed lies in wait for me, to make me fall!

MICHAL Oh, why must David be slain?

SAUL Woe to you, Michal! And David shall bring woe to you, and woe upon you David shall pull down Saul, and David shall pull down Jonathan, thee, Michal, he will pull down, yea, and all thy house Oh, thou mayst call on the teraphim of thy house But if thy teraphim love thy house, then would he smite David speedily to the death, for if David liveth I shall not live, and thou

shalt not live, and thy brother shall not live For David will bring us all down in blood

MICHAL (*weeping*) O my Father, prophesy not against him!

SAUL It shall be so What, have I no insight into the dark! And thou art now a woman abandoned of her man, and thy father castest thee off, because thou hast deceived him, and brought about his hurt

MICHAL O my Father, forgive me! Hold it not against me!

SAUL Nay, thou hast bent thy will against thy father, and called destruction upon thy father's house

MICHAL Ah, no! Ah, no!

CURTAIN

SCENE XV

Naioth in Ramah A round, pyramid-like hill, with a stair-like way to the top, where is a rude rock altar Many PROPHETS, young and old, wild and dressed in blue ephods without mantle, on the summit of the hill and down the slope Some have harps, psalteries, pipes and tabrets There is wild music and rough, ragged chanting They are expecting something Below, SAMUEL and DAVID, talking Not far off a PROPHET in attendance

PROPHETS (*on hill—irregularly crying and chanting*) This is the place of the Lord! Upon us shines the Unseen! Yea, here is very God! Who dare come into the glory! O thou, filled with the Lord, sing with me on this high place For the egg of the world is filled with God

SAMUEL (*speaking to DAVID*) It is time thou shouldst go As a fox with the dogs upon him, hast thou much fleeing to do

DAVID Must I always flee, my Father? I am already weary of flight

SAMUEL Yea, to flee away is thy position Saul cometh hither to seek thee But surely shall he fall before the Lord When he gets him back to his own city, enquire thou what is his will towards thee And if it still be evil, then flee from him diligently, while he lives

DAVID And shall there never be peace between Saul's house and mine?

SAMUEL Who knows the Lord utterly! If there be not peace this time, then shall there never in life be peace between thee and him, nor thy house and his

DAVID Yet am I his son-in-law, in Michal my wife! And my flesh yearneth unto mine own

SAMUEL Is the house of Saul thine own?

DAVID Yea, verily!

SAMUEL Dost thou say, *Yea, verily*? Hark, now! If this time there be peace between thee and him, it should be peace. But if not, then think of naught but to flee, and save thyself, and keep on fleeing while Saul yet liveth. The Lord's choice is on thee, and thou shalt be King in thy day. As for me, I shall never see thy day

DAVID Would I could make my peace with Saul! Would I could return to mine own house, and to mine own wife, and to the men of my charge!

SAMUEL My son, once the Lord chose Saul. Now hath He passed Saul over and chosen thee. Canst thou look guiltless into the face of Saul? Can he look guiltless into thy face? Can ye look into each other's faces, as men who are open and at peace with one another?

DAVID Yet would I serve him faithfully

SAMUEL Yea, verily! And in thine heart, art thou King, and pullest the crown from his brow with thine eyes

DAVID O my Father, I would not!

SAMUEL Wouldst thou not? Wilt thou say to me here and now *As the Lord liveth, I will not be King! But Saul and his house shall rule Israel for ever and Jonathan my friend shall be King over me!* Wilt thou say that to me?

DAVID Does Samuel bid me say this thing?

SAMUEL He bids thee not. But for Saul's sake, and for Jonathan's, and for Michal's, and for peace, wilt thou say it? Answer me from thine own heart, for I know the smell of false words. Yea, I bid thee, speak!

DAVID The Lord shall do unto me as He will

SAMUEL Yea, for the Lord hath anointed thee, and thou shalt rule Israel when Saul is dead, and I am dead, and the Judges of

Israel are passed away For my day is nearly over, and thine is another day Yea, Saul has lived in my day, but thou livest in thine own day, that I know not of

DAVID O my lord, is there naught but wrath and sorrow between me and Saul henceforth?

SAMUEL The Lord will show! Knowest thou not?

DAVID I would it were peace!

SAMUEL Wouldst thou verily? When the wind changes, will it not push the clouds its own way? Will fire leap lively in wet rain? The Lord is all things And Saul hath seen a tall and rushing flame and hath gone mad, for the flame rushed over him Thou seest thy God in thine own likeness, afar off, or as a brother beyond thee, who fulfils thy desire Saul yearneth for the flame thou for thy to-morrow's glory The God of Saul hath no face But thou wilt bargain with thy God So be it! I am old, and would have done Flee thou, flee, and flee again, and once more, flee So shalt thou at last have the kingdom and the glory in the sight of men I anointed thee, but I would see thee no more, for my heart is weary of its end

DAVID Wilt thou not bless me?

SAMUEL Yea, I will bless thee! Yea, I will bless thee, my son Yea, for now thy way is the way of might, yea, and even for a long space of time it shall be so But after many days, men shall come again to the faceless flame of my Strength, and of Saul's Yea, I will bless thee! Thou art brave, and alone, and by cunning must thou live, and by cunning shall thy house live for ever But hath not the Lord created the fox, and the weasel that boundeth and skipeth like a snake!

DAVID O Samuel, I have but tried to be wise! What should I do, and how should I walk in the sight of men? Tell me, my Father, and I will do it

SAMUEL Thou wilt not Thou walkest wisely, and thy Lord is with thee Yea, each man's Lord is his own, though God be but one I know not thy Lord Yet walk thou with Him Yea, thou shalt bring a new day for Israel Yea, thou shalt be great, thou shalt fight as a flower fighteth upwards, through the stones and alone with God, to flower in the sun at last For the yearning of the Lord streameth as a sun, even upon the stones (*A tumult above among the PROPHETS SAMUEL looks up—continues abstractedly*)

BLACKMORE (*softly*) Pride, pride, pride!

A child of eight suddenly appears in the doorway

JACK Oo, how dark!

MRS HOLROYD (*hurrying agitated into the kitchen*) Why, where have you been—what have you been doing now?

JACK (*surprised*) Why—I've only been out to play

MRS HOLROYD (*still sharply*) And where's Minnie?

A little girl of six appears by the door

MINNIE I'm here, mam, and what do you think—?

MRS HOLROYD (*softening, as she recovers equanimity*) Well, and what should I think?

JACK Oh, yes, mam—you know my father—?

MRS HOLROYD (*ironically*) I should hope so

MINNIE We saw him dancing, mam, with a paper bonnet

MRS HOLROYD What—?

JACK There's some women at New Inn, what's come from Nottingham—

MINNIE An' he's dancin' with the pink one

JACK Shut up, our Minnie An' they've got paper bonnets on—

MINNIE All colours, mam!

JACK (*getting angry*) Shut up our Minnie! An' my dad's dancing with her

MINNIE With the pink-bonnet one, mam

JACK Up in the club-room over the bar

MINNIE An' she's a lot littler than him, mam

JACK (*piteously*) Shut up, our Minnie— An' you can see 'em go past the window, 'cause there isn't no curtains up, an' my father's got the pink bonnet one—

MINNIE An' there's a piano, mam—

JACK An' lots of folks outside watchin', lookin' at my dad! He can dance, can't he, mam?

MRS HOLROYD (*she has been lighting the lamp, and holds the lamp-glass*) And who else is there?

MINNIE Some more men—an' *all* the women with paper bonnets on

JACK There's about ten, I should think, an' they say they came in a brake from Nottingham

MRS HOLROYD, *trying to replace the lamp-glass over the flame, lets it drop on the floor with a smash*

JACK There, now—now we'll have to have a candle

Yea, and as a flower thou shalt fade But Saul was once a burning bush, afire with God Alas, that he saw his own image mirrored in the faces of men! (*A blare of music above*)

SAMUEL (*to* PROPHET) What see ye?

PROPHETS (*shouting*) The sun on the arms of the King

SAMUEL (*to* DAVID) Now shalt thou go! For I, too, will not set mine eyes upon Saul the King

DAVID Bless me then, O my Father!

SAMUEL The Lord fill thy heart and thy soul! The Lord quicken thee! The Lord kindle thy spirit, so thou fall into no snare! And now get thee gone! And when Saul is returned to his own place, enquire thou secretly his will towards thee And then act wisely, as thou knowest

DAVID I go forth into the fields, as a hare when the hound gives mouth! But if the Lord go with me

Exit DAVID

SAMUEL (*to* PROPHET) Is Saul surely in sight?

PROPHET Verily, he is not far off He has passed the well of Shecu

SAMUEL Has he company of men?

PROPHET Ten armed men has he

SAMUEL Will he still bring armed men to the high place? Lo! Say thou to him Samuel hath gone before the Lord, in the hidden places of the Hill

PROPHET I will e'en say it

SAMUEL Say also to him David, the anointed, is gone, we know not whither And let the company of the prophets come down towards the King

PROPHET It shall be so

Exit SAMUEL

PROPHET (*climbing hill and calling*) O ye Prophets of the Lord, put yourselves in array, to meet Saul the King

2ND PROPHET (*on hill with flute—sounds flute loudly with a strong tune—shouts*) Oh, come, all ye that know our God! Oh, put yourselves in array, ye that know the Name For that which is without name is lovelier than anything named! (*Sounds the tune strongly*)

PROPHETS *gather in array—musicians in front, they chant slowly As SAUL approaches they slowly descend*

CHORUS OF PROPHETS Armies there are, for the Lord our God!

Armies there are against the Lord!
Wilt thou shake spears in the face of Almighty God?
Lo! in thy face shakes the lightning [Bis
Countest thou thyself a strong man, sayest thou Ha-ha!
Lo! We are strong in the Lord! Our arrow seest thou not!
Yet with the unseen arrows of high heaven
Pierce we the wicked man's feet, pierce we his feet in the fight
Lo! the bow of our body is strung by God
Lo! how He taketh aim with arrow-heads of our wrath!
Prophet of God is an arrow in full flight
And he shall pierce thy shield, thou, thou Lord's enemy
Long is the fight, yet the unseen arrows fly
Keen to a wound in the soul of the great Lord's enemy
Slowly he bleeds, yet the red drops run away
Unseen and inwardly, as bleeds the wicked man
Bleeding of God! Secretly of God

SAUL enters with ARMED MEN *PROPHETS continue to chant*

SAUL Peace be with you!

PROPHET Peace be with the King!

SAUL Lo! ye prophets of God! Is not Samuel set over you?

PROPHET Yea! O King!

SAUL (*beginning to come under the influence of the chant and to take the rhythm in his voice*) Is Samuel not here?

PROPHET He hath gone up before the Lord!

SAUL Surely the Lord is in this place! Surely the great brightness
(*Looks round*)—and the son of Jesse, is he among the prophets?

PROPHET Nay, he has gone hence

SAUL Gone! Gone! What, has he fled from the high place! Surely
he feared the glory! Yea, the brightness! So he has fled before
the flame! Thus shall he flee before the flame! But gone? Whither
gone?

PROPHET We know not whither

SAUL Even let him go! Even let him go whither he will! Yea,
even let him go! Yea! Come we forth after such as he? Let him
go! Is not the Lord here? Surely the brightness is upon the hill!
Surely it gleams upon this high place!

LEADER OF MEN-AT-ARMS Tarry we here, O King? Where shall we
seek the son of Jesse?

SAUL Even where ye will

LEADER Tarrieth the King here?

SAUL Yea! I will know if the Lord is verily in this place

PROPHET Verily He is here

Company of PROPHETS still chant

SAUL (*going slowly forward*) Art Thou here, O Lord? What? Is this Thy brightness upon the hill? What? Art Thou here in Thy glory?

COMPANY OF PROPHETS Fire within fire is the presence of the Lord!

Sun within the sun is our God! [Bis

Rises the sun among the hills of thy heart

Rising to shine in thy breast? [Bis

SAUL Yea! O Prophets! Am I not King? Shall not the Sun of suns rise among the hills of my heart, and make dawn in my body? What! Shall these prophets know the glory of the Lord, and shall the son of Kish stay under a cloud? (*Sticks his spear into the ground, and unbuckles his sword-belt*)

LEADER OF ARMED MEN Wilt thou go up before the Lord, O King?

Then camp we here, to await thy pleasure

SAUL I will go up Camp an ye will

LEADER Even camp we here (*They untackle*)

SAUL Ha! Ha! Is there a glory upon the prophets? Do their voices resound like rocks in the valley! Ha! Ha! Thou of the sudden fire! I am coming! Yea! I will come into the glory! (*Advancing, throws down his woollen mantle The 1ST PROPHET takes it up*)

CHORUS OF PROPHETS Whiteness of wool helps thee not in the high place

Colours on thy coat avail thee naught [Bis

Fire unto fire only speaks, and only flame

Beckons to flame of the Lord! [Bis

The PROPHETS divide and make way as SAUL comes up

SAUL Is my heart a cold hearth? Is my heart fireless unto Thee?

Kindler! it shall not be so! My heart shall shine to Thee, yea, unshadow itself Yea, the fire in me shall mount to the fire of Thee, Thou Wave of Brightness!

SOLDIER (*below—with loud and sudden shout*) The sun is in my heart Lo! I shine forth!

SAUL (*with suddenness*) I will come up! Oh! I will come up! Dip me in the flame of brightness, Thou Bright One, call up the

sun in my heart, out of the clouds of me Lo' I have been darkened and deadened with ashes! Blow a fierce flame on me, from the middle of Thy glory, O Thou of the faceless flame (*Goes slowly forward*) Oh, dip me in the ceaseless flame!

Throws down his coat, or wide-sleeved tunic that came below the knee and was heavily embroidered at neck and sleeves in many colours is seen in the sleeveless shirt that comes half-way down the thigh

SOLDIER (*below*) Kings come and pass away, but the flame is flame for ever The Lord is here, like a tree of white fire! Yea, and the white glory goes in my nostrils like a scent

SAUL Shall a soldier be more blessed than I? Lo' I am not dead, thou Almighty! My flesh is still flame, still steady flame Flame to flame calleth, and that which is dead is cast away (*Flings off his shirt is seen, a dark-skinned man in leathern loin-girdle*) Nay, I carry naught upon me, the long flame of my body leans to the flame of all glory! I am no king, save in the Glory of God I have no kingdom, save my body and soul I have no name But as a slow and dark flame leaneth to a great glory of flame, and is sipped up, naked and nameless lean I to the glory of the Lord

CHORUS OF PROPHETS Standeth a man upon the stem of upright knees

Openeth the navel's closed bud, unfoldeth the flower of the breast!

Lo' Like the cup of a flower, with morning sun

Filled is thy breast with the Lord, filled is thy navel's wide flower!

SOLDIER Oh, come! For a little while the glory of the Lord stands upon the high place! Oh, come! before they build Him houses, and enclose Him within a roof! Oh, it is good to live now, with the light of the first day's sun upon the breast For when the seed of David have put the Lord inside a house, the glory will be gone, and men will walk with no transfiguration! Oh, come to this high place! Oh, come!

SAUL Surely I feel my death upon me! Surely the sleep of sleeps descends (*Casts himself down*) I cast myself down, night and day, as in death, lie I naked before God Ah, what is life to me! Alas that a man must live till death visit him!—that he cannot walk away into the cloud of Sun! Alas for my life! For my children and my children's children, alas! For the son of Jesse

will wipe them out! Alas for Israel! For the fox will trap the lion of strength, and the weasel that is a virgin, and bringeth forth her young from her mouth, shall be at the throats of brave men! Yea, by cunning shall Israel prosper, in the days of the seed of David and by cunning and lurking in holes of the earth shall the seed of Jesse fill the earth. Then the Lord of Glory will have drawn far off, and gods shall be pitiful, and men shall be as locusts. But I, I feel my death upon me, even in the glory of the Lord. Yea, leave me in peace before my death, let me retreat into the flame!

A pause

ANOTHER SOLDIER Saul hath abandoned his kingdom and his men!

Yea, he puts the Lord between him and his work!

PROPHET E'en let him be! For his loss is greater than another's triumph

SOLDIER Yea! But wherefore shall a man leave his men leaderless—even for the Lord!

1ST SOLDIER (*prophesying*) When thou withdrawest Thy glory, let me go with Thee, O Brightest, even into the fire of Thee!

CHORUS OF PROPHETS Cast thyself down, that the Lord may snatch thee up

Fall before the Lord, and fall high

All things come forth from the flame of Almighty God,

Some things shall never return!

[*Bis*]

Some have their way and their will, and pass at last

To the worm's waiting mouth

[*Bis*]

But the high Lord He leans down upon the hill,

And wraps His own in His flame,

Wraps them as whirlwind from the world,

Leaves not one sigh for the grave

CURTAIN

SCENE XVI

Late afternoon A rocky place outside Gilgal DAVID is hiding near the stone Ezel

DAVID (*alone*) Now, if Jonathan comes not, I am lost This is the fourth day, and evening is nigh Lo' Saul seeketh my life O Lord, look upon me, and hinder mine enemies! Frustrate them, make them stumble, O my God! So near am I to Gilgal, yet between me and mine own house lies the whole gap of death Yea, Michal, thou art not far from me Yet art thou distant even as death I hide and have hidden Three days have I hidden, and eaten scant bread Lo' Is this to be the Lord's anointed! Saul will kill me, and I shall die! There! Someone moves across the field! Ah, watch! watch! Is it Jonathan? It is two men, yea, it is two men And one walks before the other Surely it is Jonathan and his lad! Surely he has kept his word! O Lord, save me now from mine enemies, for they compass me round O Lord my God, put a rope round the neck of my enemy, lest he rush forward and seize me in the secret place Yea, it is Jonathan, in a striped coat And a man behind him carrieth the bow Yea, now must I listen, and uncover my ears, for this is life or death O that he may say *Behold, the arrows are on this side of thee, take them!* For then I can come forth and go to my house, and the King will look kindly on me—But he comes slowly, and sadly And he will say *The arrows are beyond thee*—and I shall have to flee away like a hunted dog, into the desert—It will be so! Yea! And I must hide lest that lad who follows Jonathan should see me, and set Saul's soldiery upon me

Exit DAVID after a pause

Enter JONATHAN with bow, and LAD with quiver

JONATHAN (*stringing his bow*) Lo' this is the stone Ezel Seest thou the dead bush, like a camel's head? That is a mark I have shot at, and now, before the light falls, will I put an arrow through his nose (*Takes an arrow*) Will this fly well? (*Balancing it*)

LAD It is well shafted, O Jonathan

JONATHAN Ay! Let us shoot (*Takes aim—shoots*) Yea, it touched

the camel's ear, but not his nose! Give me another! (*Shoots*) Ah! Hadst thou a throat, thou camel, thou wert dead Yet is thy nose too cheerful! Let us try again! (*Takes another arrow—shoots*) Surely there is a scratch upon thy nose-tip! Nay, I am not myself! Give me the quiver And run thou, take up the arrows ere the shadows come

LAD I will find them

He runs, as he goes JONATHAN shoots an arrow over his head

The LAD runs after it—stops

JONATHAN Is not the arrow beyond thee?

LAD One is here! Here, another!

JONATHAN The arrow is beyond thee! Make speed! Haste! Stay not!

LAD Three have I! But the fourth—

JONATHAN The arrow is beyond thee! Run, make haste!

LAD I see it not! I see it not! Yea, it is there within bush I have it, and it is whole O master, is this all?

JONATHAN There is one more Behold it is beyond thee

LAD (*running*) I see it not! I see it not! Yea, it is here!

JONATHAN It is all Come, then! Come! Nay, the light is fading and I cannot see Take thou the bow and the arrows, and go home For I will rest here awhile by the stone Ezel

LAD Will my master come home alone?

JONATHAN Yea will I, with the peace of day's-end upon me Go now, and wait me in the house I shall soon come

Exit LAD JONATHAN sits down on a stone till he is gone

JONATHAN (*calling softly*) David! David!

DAVID comes forth, weeping Falls on his face to the ground and bows himself three times before JONATHAN JONATHAN raises him They kiss one another, and weep

DAVID Ah, then it is death, it is death to me from Saul?

JONATHAN Yea, he seeks thy life, and thou must flee far hence

DAVID (*weeping*) Ah, Jonathan! Thy servant thanks thee from his heart But ah, Jonathan, it is bitter to go, to flee like a dog, to be houseless and homeless and wifeless, without a friend or helpmate! Oh, what have I done, what have I done! Tell me, what have I done! And slay me if I be in fault

JONATHAN (*in tears*) Thou art not in fault Nay, thou art not! But thou art anointed, and thou shalt be King Hath not Samuel

said it even now, in Naioth, when he would not look upon the face of Saul! Yea, thou must flee until thy day come, and the day of the death of Saul, and the day of the death of Jonathan
 DAVID (*weeping*) Oh, I have not chosen this This have I not taken upon myself This is put upon me, I have not chosen it! I do not want to go! Yea, let me come to Gilgal and die so I see thy face and the face of Michal, and the face of the King Let me die! Let me come to Gilgal and die! (*Flings himself on the ground in a paroxysm of grief*)

JONATHAN Nay! Thou shalt not die Thou shalt flee! And till Saul be dead, thou shalt flee But when Saul has fallen, and I have fallen with my father—for even now my life follows my father—then thou shalt be King

DAVID I cannot go!

JONATHAN Yea! Thou shalt go now For they will send forth men to meet me, ere the dark Rise now, and be comforted (DAVID rises)

DAVID Why shouldst thou save me! Why dost thou withhold thy hand! Slay me now!

JONATHAN I would not slay thee, nor now nor ever But leave me now, and go And go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the Lord, saying *The Lord be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed for ever*

DAVID Yea, the covenant is between us! And I will go, and keep it
They embrace in silence, and in silence DAVID goes out

JONATHAN (*alone in the twilight*) Thou goest David! And the hope of Israel with thee! I remain, with my father and the star-stone falling to despair Yet what is it to me! I would not see thy new day, David For thy wisdom is the wisdom of the subtle, and behind thy passion lies prudence And naked thou wilt not go into the fire Yea, go thou forth, and let me die For thy virtue is in thy wit, and thy shrewdness But in Saul have I known the magnanimity of a man Yea, thou art a smiter down of giants, with a smart stone! Great men and magnanimous, men of the faceless flame, shall fall from Strength, fall before thee, thou David, shrewd whelp of the lion of Judah! Yet my heart yearns hot over thee, as over a tender, quick child And the heart of my father yearns, even amid its dark wrath But thou goest forth, and knowest no depth of yearning, thou son of Jesse Yet go!

For my twilight is more to me than thy day, and my death is dearer to me than thy life! Take it! Take thou the kingdom, and the days to come. In the flames of death where Strength is, I will wait and watch till the day of David at last shall be finished, and wisdom no more be fox-faced, and the blood gets back its flame. Yea, the flame dies not, though the sun's red dies! And I must get me to the city

Rises and departs hastily

CURTAIN

The Married Man

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

(1912—revised 1926)

BLACKMORE I ought to have remembered your tender nerves Shall I come in?

MRS HOLROYD No—not for your impudence But you're late, aren't you?

BLACKMORE It's only just gone six We electricians, you know, we're the gentlemen on a mine ours is gentlemen's work But I'll bet Charles Holroyd was home before four

MRS HOLROYD (*bitterly*) Ay, and gone again before five

BLACKMORE But mine's a lad's job, and I do nothing!—Where's he gone?

MRS HOLROYD (*contemptuously*) Dunno! He'd got a game on somewhere—toffed himself up to the nines, and skedaddled off as brisk as a turkey-cock (*She smirks in front of the mirror hanging on the chimney-piece, in imitation of a man brushing his hair and moustache and admiring himself*)

BLACKMORE Though turkey-cocks aren't brisk as a rule Children playing?

MRS HOLROYD (*recovering herself, coldly*) Yes And they ought to be in

She continues placing the flannel garments before the fire, on the fender and on chair-backs, till the stove is hedged in with a steaming fence, then she takes a sheet in a bundle from the table, and goes up to BLACKMORE, who stands watching her

Here, take hold, and help me fold it

BLACKMORE I shall swarf it up

MRS HOLROYD (*snatching back the sheet*) Oh, you're as tiresome as everybody else

BLACKMORE (*putting down his basket and moving to door on right*) Well, I can soon wash my hands

MRS HOLROYD (*ceasing to flap and fold pillow-cases*) That roller-towel's ever so dirty I'll get you another (*She goes to a drawer in the dresser, and then back toward the scullery, from which comes the sound of water*)

BLACKMORE Why, bless my life, I'm a lot dirtier than the towel I don't want another

MRS HOLROYD (*going into the scullery*) Here you are

BLACKMORE (*softly, now she is near him*) Why did you trouble now?

Pride, you know, pride, nothing else

MRS HOLROYD (*also playful*) It's nothing but decency

CHARACTERS

DR GEORGE GRAINGER

WILLIAM BRETNALL

MRS PLUM

JACK MAGNEER

ANNIE CALLADINE

ADA CALLADINE sisters

EMILY CALLADINE

SALLY MAGNEER, Jack's sister

MR MAGNEER, father of Jack and Sally

ELSA SMITH, Brentnall's fiancée

GLADYS

TOM, husband of Gladys

ETHEL, Grainger's wife

ACT I

A bedroom in Mrs Plum's cottage

ACT II

The dining-room in the house of the Misses Calladine

ACT III

Kitchen at Mr Magneer's farm

ACT IV

The same as Act I

ACT I

A bedroom shared by GRAINGER and BRETNALL in the cottage of
MRS PLUM *Both men are dressing GRAINGER goes to the door*
and calls to MRS PLUM

GRAINGER Bring me some collars up

BRETNALL And what are you going to do?

GRAINGER God knows

BRETNALL How much money have you got?

GRAINGER Four damn quid

BRETNALL Hm!—You're well off, considering But what *do* you think of doing?

GRAINGER I don't know

BRETNALL Where do you think of going Saturday?

GRAINGER Hell

BRETNALL Too expensive, my boy—four quid won't carry you there

GRAINGER Oh chuck it, Billy

BRETNALL What the Hanovers the good of chucking it? You're not a blooming cock robin to take no thought for the morrow

Enter MRS PLUM with the collars

MRS PLUM Gee, I'm sorry I forgot 'em, Dr Grainger I'm ever so sorry

GRAINGER Don't fret yourself about that, Mrs Plum You're all right, you are

MRS PLUM Gee, but I can't get it out of my head, that there what you've just told me

GRAINGER You want to sneeze hard, Mrs Plum That'll shift it

MRS PLUM (*laughing*) Hee-hee—hark you there now And have you got rid of it off your mind, Dr Grainger?

GRAINGER My head's as clear as a bell & brass, Mrs Plum Nothing ails me

MRS PLUM My word, it doesn't My word, but you're looking well, you're a sight better than when you come Isn't he, Mr Brentnall?

BRETNALL He's too healthy for anything, Mrs Plum—he's so

healthy, he'd walk slap into a brick wall, and never know he'd hurt himself

MRS PLUM Gee—I don't know But that there as you told me, Dr Grainger—

GRAINGER Here, you go and see if that's Jack Magneer, and if it is, let him come up

MRS PLUM You're a caution, you are that, Dr Grainger

Exit MRS PLUM

BRETNALL The girl is gone on you, the kid is yours You are a married man, and you mean to abide by your family?

GRAINGER What the devil else is there to do?

BRETNALL Very well Have you bothered about another job?

GRAINGER No—I did when I was in Wolverhampton Look what a fiendish business it is, offering yourself and being refused like a dog

BRETNALL So you've taken no steps

GRAINGER No

BRETNALL And you've absolutely no idea what you're going to do on Saturday, when you've finished here?

GRAINGER No

BRETNALL And yet you mean to stick by your wife and kid?

GRAINGER What else can I do?

BRETNALL Well, you're a beauty! You're just skulking, like a frightened rabbit

GRAINGER Am I, begad?

BRETNALL Are you fond of the kid?

GRAINGER I shouldn't like anything to happen to it

BRETNALL Neither should I But the feelings of your breast towards it—?

GRAINGER Well, I'm a lot *fonder* of that youngster at my digs in Wolverhampton—you know—

BRETNALL Then you feel no paternal emotion?

GRAINGER No Don't talk rot.

BRETNALL How often have you been over to see your wife?

GRAINGER Once

BRETNALL Once since you were married?

GRAINGER Yes

BRETNALL And that when the baby was first born?

GRAINGER Yes

BRENTNALL And you're living—which a recluse, or a gay bachelor?

GRAINGER You can imagine me a recluse

BRENTNALL You're a blossom, Georgie, you're a jewel of a muddler

GRAINGER How could I help it! I was careful enough with the girl
—I never thought, to tell you the truth, that—here's Jack!

BRENTNALL That what?

GRAINGER Shut up Jack's a fine fellow

BRENTNALL Needs to be, to match you

GRAINGER Now Bill Brentnall, none of your sark

JACK'S VOICE How long are you going to be?

GRAINGER How-do Jack! Shan't be a sec Come up

Enter JACK MAGNEER—aged 33—very big, a farmer, something of a gentleman, wears leggings and breeches, and a black bow tie

JACK Seem to be donning yourselves up—how are you?

GRAINGER Mr Magneer—Mr Brentnall Jack—Billy

JACK Yis, quite so How are you, Billy?

BRENTNALL I'm very well You're Miss Magneer's brother?

GRAINGER Sally's

JACK Yis, I am and what of it?

BRENTNALL Oh—only you are lucky

GRAINGER *whistles gaily*

JACK What you whistling for, George lad? Aren't I lucky?

GRAINGER I wish Sally was my sister, Jack

JACK Yis, you do, an' so do I George lad—then me an' you'd be brothers—Oh, my good God are you going to be all night titivating yourselves up?

GRAINGER Jack's in a hurry

JACK No I'm not, but damn it all—

GRAINGER Alright Jacko, alright I know she's a very nice girl—

BRENTNALL Where are you taking me?

GRAINGER To see some real fine girls

JACK Not so much fine girls, Billy—some damn nice girls, nice girls, mind you

GRAINGER Quite right, Jacko (*Seriously*) No, but they are, Billy, real nice girls Three sisters, orphans

JACK An' the oldest of them will happen to be Mrs Grainger—eh, what?

GRAINGER Liar!

JACK You see Billy, it's like this I'm glad you've come, because it levels us up I believe you're a nice chap Don't you take me wrong I mean you're not one of these damn sods as can see nowt in a girl but—you know

BRENTNALL Yes

GRAINGER Yes, Billy knows Most moral young man

JACK Fooling apart, George, aren't they nice girls?

GRAINGER *Really* nice girls, they are

JACK But you see, there's three of 'em—an' we've never been but two of us—d'you twig?

BRENTNALL I twig

JACK But no fooling, mind you

BRENTNALL Thanks for your caution, Mr Magneer

JACK Oh no, no Nothing of the sort only they *are* nice girls—you see what I mean—oh no, Billy——

GRAINGER And three of 'em

BRENTNALL And the odd one falls to me Thanks, I was born to oblige

JACK Now Billy, no I want you t'have a good time You see what I mean I'm willing to step aside You're here only for a bit—I'm always here So I want you——

GRAINGER "I want all of you t'have a good time"

JACK Yis, I do I do that, George

GRAINGER That's always Jacko's cry—"I want you t'have it your own road I'm willing any road I want you t'have a good time" Self-effacing chap is Jack

BRENTNALL Do I put on a dinner jacket?

GRAINGER Good God, no—have you brought one?

BRENTNALL Well—I might have to dine at some people's down towards Ashbourne

CURTAIN

ACT II

A long, low dining-room—table laid for supper—bowls of crimson and white flowers, a large lamp—an old-fashioned room, furnished with taste

The oldest MISS CALLADINE—aged 32 tall slim, pale, dressed in black, wearing Parma violets, looks ladylike, but rather yearning She walks about restlessly

Enter DR GRAINGER

ANNIE Aren't you late?

GRAINGER A little—waiting for my friend He's gone round to "The George" with Jack—some arrangement about farm stock *(He takes both her hands, which she offers him yearningly, and, after glancing round, kisses her hastily as if unwillingly)* Where's Emily?

ANNIE Emily and Ada are both entertaining Mrs Wesson in the drawing-room I hope they'll get rid of her before Jack comes I'm afraid we are being talked about I'm afraid I'm not doing my duty by the girls

GRAINGER What do you mean?

ANNIE You are here so often

GRAINGER I'm going away directly, so you'll be safe after Saturday

ANNIE Really going away on Saturday—really—really *(Puts her hands on his shoulders)*

GRAINGER That's right

ANNIE Then people will talk more than ever I shall be considered loose and what's to become of the girls—

GRAINGER You considered loose—oh Cæsar!

ANNIE Where are you going?

GRAINGER Don't know

ANNIE Why won't you tell me?

GRAINGER Because I don't know I am waiting for a letter—it will come to-morrow Either I shall be going to Scotland, or down to London—one or the other, but I don't know which

ANNIE Scotland or London!

GRAINGER I hope it's London

ANNIE Why do you?

GRAINGER Well—more life, for one thing

ANNIE And is it "life" you want? That sort of life?

GRAINGER Not that sort, exactly—but—oh, by the way, I told you
I was bringing my friend—

ANNIE Mr Brentnall—yes

GRAINGER Well, don't be surprised if I seem rather different to-
night, will you? Billy's very circumspect, very circumspect—nice,
mind you, but *good*

ANNIE I see

GRAINGER You'll like him though

ANNIE (*bitingly*) In spite of his goodness

GRAINGER Yes, I know you like "life" better than "goodness"—
don't you now?

He puts his hand under her chin

ANNIE (*drawing away*) You seem to know a great deal about me

GRAINGER I know what you want

ANNIE What?

GRAINGER (*glancing round to see if he is safe—taking her in his
arms, pressing her close, kissing her She submits because she
can scarcely help herself—there is a sound of feet and voices—he
hastily releases her*) That!

ANNIE (*struggling with herself*) Indeed no, Dr Grainger

GRAINGER That's the ticket—keep it up, Annie

*Enter EMILY and ADA CALLADINE—EMILY, aged 27, quiet, self-
possessed, dressed all in black—ADA, aged 23—rather plump,
handsome, charmingly young and wicked-looking—dressed in
black and purple, with a crimson flower*

ANNIE Has Mrs Wesson gone?

ADA Not before she heard a man's voice—I told her you were
engaged

GRAINGER You what?

ADA (*bursting with laughter*). I told her Annie was engaged

ANNIE (*severely*) With a caller, you mean, Ada?

GRAINGER Oh, I see

ADA Yes—oh yes—oh how *funny*!

GRAINGER Not funny at all—Jack's doing some business round at
"The George", Emily

EMILY Is he?

GRAINGER (*discomfited*) I think I'll go and hurry them up

ADA Do!

ANNIE You think it is quite safe to bring your *good* friend here?

GRAINGER Oh, quite safe, Annie—don't be alarmed Ta-ta!

Exit GRAINGER He is heard running down the stairs

ANNIE I don't think Dr Grainger improves on acquaintance

ADA We've never got any further with him, so we can't say

EMILY Why do you think so, Annie?

ANNIE (*rather haughtily*) You would not guess what he said to me

ADA I think you've given him rather a long rope

ANNIE (*with dignity*) If I have, he's hit me across the face with it

EMILY What did he say, Annie?

ANNIE He is bringing a friend—a school and college friend—in a bank in London now—rather genteel, I believe Well, Dr Grainger said to me this evening "You know my friend is *very* circum-spect, *very* circumspect, so you won't be surprised if my be-haviour is rather different this evening"

ADA Oh indeed!

EMILY You should have kept him more in his place, Annie

ANNIE I should, but I thought he was a gentleman I don't know how we're going to receive them this evening

EMILY We need simply take no notice of him, and be just polite

ANNIE But we don't know what he may have told his friend about us

EMILY I never cared for him

ADA Oh, what ripping fun!

ANNIE Ada, be careful what you do and say

ADA It's not I who've put my foot in it It is you if any one

ANNIE I have been too free, perhaps, but you cannot say I have put my foot in it I wish I had never admitted Dr Grainger at all—but he came with Jack——

EMILY We shall go through alright with it Simply despise Dr Grainger

ANNIE He is despicable

ADA He is here

ANNIE Emily will you go downstairs and receive them? Ada, you stay here

Exit EMILY—voices downstairs

BLACKMORE (*softly*) Pride, pride, pride!

A child of eight suddenly appears in the doorway

JACK Oo, how dark!

MRS HOLROYD (*hurrying agitated into the kitchen*) Why, where have you been—what have you been doing now?

JACK (*surprised*) Why—I've only been out to play

MRS HOLROYD (*still sharply*) And where's Minnie?

A little girl of six appears by the door

MINNIE I'm here, mam, and what do you think—?

MRS HOLROYD (*softening, as she recovers equanimity*) Well, and what should I think?

JACK Oh, yes, mam—you know my father—?

MRS HOLROYD (*ironically*) I should hope so

MINNIE We saw him dancing, mam, with a paper bonnet

MRS HOLROYD What—?

JACK There's some women at New Inn, what's come from Nottingham—

MINNIE An' he's dancin' with the pink one

JACK Shut up, our Minnie An' they've got paper bonnets on—

MINNIE All colours, mam!

JACK (*getting angry*) Shut up, our Minnie! An' my dad's dancing with her

MINNIE With the pink-bonnet one, mam

JACK Up in the club-room over the bar

MINNIE An' she's a lot littler than him, mam

JACK (*piteously*) Shut up, our Minnie— An' you can see 'em go past the window, 'cause there isn't no curtains up, an' my father's got the pink bonnet one—

MINNIE An' there's a piano, mam—

JACK An' lots of folks outside watchin', lookin' at my dad! He can dance, can't he, mam?

MRS HOLROYD (*she has been lighting the lamp, and holds the lamp-glass*) And who else is there?

MINNIE Some more men—an' *all* the women with paper bonnets on

JACK There's about ten, I should think, an' they say they came in a brake from Nottingham

MRS HOLROYD, *trying to replace the lamp-glass over the flame, lets it drop on the floor with a smash*

JACK There, now—now we'll have to have a candle

ADA They are all three here—I must go also

Exit ADA

ANNIE CALLADINE *straightens her hair before the mirror, rubs out her wrinkles, puts her flowers nicely, and seats herself with much composure Enter GRAINGER and BRENTNALL, followed by*

ADA CALLADINE

GRAINGER (*stiffly*) Miss Annie Calladine—Mr Brentnall

BRENTNALL What a nice smell of flowers

ANNIE It is the mezereon that Mr Magneer brought

BRENTNALL Did Mr Magneer bring flowers? I shouldn't have thought the idea could occur to him

ANNIE He always brings flowers from the *garden* It would never occur to him to buy them for us

BRENTNALL I see—how nice of him

GRAINGER All country fellows cart handfuls of flowers that they've got out of their own gardens, to their girls

ANNIE Nevertheless, Mr Magneer does it nicely

Enter MAGNEER and EMILY

JACK Now we seem as if we're going to be alright What do you say, George?

GRAINGER I say the same

ANNIE Do take a seat, all of you Jack, you love the couch—

JACK It's a very nice couch, this is (*Sits down*)

BRENTNALL I should think it would be the easiest thing in life to write a poem about a couch I wonder if the woman was giving Cowper a gentle hint—

ADA (*shrieking with laughter*) Yes—yes—yes!

BRENTNALL I never see a couch but my heart moves to poetry The very buttons must be full of echoes—

JACK (*bending his ear*) Can't hear 'em, Billy

BRENTNALL Will none of you tune his ear?

ADA Yes—yes!

EMILY (*seating herself quietly beside JACK*) What is it you are listening for, Jack?

JACK (*awkwardly*) I've no idea

ANNIE Where will you sit, Mr Brentnall? Do choose a comfortable chair

BRENTNALL (*seating himself beside her*) Thanks very much

JACK Nay—nay—nay, Billy

BRENTNALL (*rising suddenly*) Er—there's a broken spring in that chair, Miss Calladine (*He crosses the hearth*)

ANNIE I'm so sorry—have a cushion—do!

BRENTNALL Will you allow me to sit here?

ADA Let me give you some supper

GRAINGER Shall I administer the drinks?

GRAINGER *gives the women burgundy, the men whisky and soda* ADA CALLADINE *hands round food* GRAINGER *seats himself reluctantly beside* ANNIE CALLADINE—ADA CALLADINE *takes a low chair next to* BRENTNALL

JACK Now we are alright—at least I hope so

BRENTNALL (*to ADA*) You are quite alright?

ADA (*laughing*) As far as I know

BRENTNALL (*to EMILY*) I can see you are perfectly at home (*EMILY bows quietly, with a smile*) And you, Miss Calladine?

ANNIE Thank you!

BRENTNALL Gentlemen—the ladies!

GRAINGER (*ironically*) God bless 'em

JACK Amen! (*They drink*)

ADA Ladies—the gentlemen!

ANNIE God help them

EMILY Amen! (*They drink*)

BRENTNALL Wherein must the Lord help us, Miss Calladine?

ANNIE To run away, Mr Brentnall

EMILY Annie!

ADA To come to the scratch, you mean

BRENTNALL Ha! Gentlemen—to marriage!

JACK I don't think!

ANNIE What is your comment, Dr Grainger?

GRAINGER Mine!

BRENTNALL Dr Grainger is a confirmed misogynist

GRAINGER Shut up, you fool

ANNIE Oh—we've not heard so before

JACK D'you mean George doesn't believe in marriage? Nay, you're wrong there. When th' time comes—

ANNIE When *does* the time come for a man to marry, Jack?

JACK When he can't help it I s'd think (*Silence*)

BRENTNALL You're very quiet George

GRAINGER Don't you be a fool

ANNIE Your humour is not very complimentary this evening, Dr Grainger

JACK There's perhaps too many of us in th' room, eh?

ANNIE Not too many for me, Jack

ADA (*bursting into laughter*) Do be complimentary, somebody, if only to cheer us up

JACK (*putting his arm round EMILY's waist*) Yis, I will

BRETNALL (*putting his arm round ADA's neck*) May I kiss you, Ada?

ADA (*laughing*) How (*laughs*)—how awfully nice (*laughs heartily*) of you (*BRETNALL kisses her*)

JACK Oh my God, now we're coming on (*He kisses EMILY furtively*)

BRETNALL Mind your own business

Seizes a newspaper, and screens it before him and ADA—they put their heads together

JACK I call that comin' on—eh what?

BRETNALL (*to ADA—behind the newspaper*) Well, I'll be damned!

ANNIE (*loudly and sarcastically*) Do you like the flavour, Mr Brentnall?

BRETNALL (*from behind the paper*) Excellent! (*Sotto voce*) You are awfully jolly

JACK (*bouncing with surprise*) Well strike me lucky!

BRETNALL (*throwing him another newspaper*) Here you are then!

JACK Good God! (*He spreads the paper before him and EMILY*)

GRAINGER You damn fool, Billy Brentnall

BRETNALL Dog in the manger (*Softly to ADA*) Do you think I'm a fool? No, you like me

JACK (*from behind his paper*) How're you going on, Billy?

BRETNALL Fine How're you going on, George?

The four peep over their newspapers at GRAINGER and ANNIE

BRETNALL Temperature down at freezing point over there?

GRAINGER I'll have it out of you for this, William

ANNIE Why, what has Mr Brentnall done amiss, Dr Grainger?

BRETNALL (*from behind his paper*) Oh, it's not I It's George's sins finding him out Be sure your sins will find you out

ADA (*softly*) You're not a bit what I thought you would be

BRETNALL (*softly*) Worse or better?

ADA (*laughing*) Oh—better

BRENTNALL What did you think I should be?

ADA Circumspect

GRAINGER *sends a cushion smashing through their paper*

JACK What the devil's up, George?

ANNIE Oh, it annoys him to see other people enjoying themselves when he can't

BRENTNALL (*spreading the paper for screen*) The nail on the head,

Miss—may I say Annie?

ANNIE Yes, Mr Brentnall

BRENTNALL I wish I were two men, Annie

GRAINGER *sends the cushion again smashing through the newspaper*

JACK God help thee George, do settle down

BRENTNALL (*spreading the paper again*) It's high time he did—settle down, George—it's good advice

ADA (*softly*) What makes him so cross to-night?

BRENTNALL (*softly*) Don't know—unless he's shy

ADA (*bursting with laughter*) Shy!

BRENTNALL Why, isn't he?

ADA You should see the way he carries on——

BRENTNALL With you?

ADA Annie

The cushion crashes through the paper

JACK Damn thee George, take Annie downstairs a minute, if she can't bide still

GRAINGER That fool there——!

BRENTNALL (*restoring the fragments of paper—softly—to ADA*) You know there's a secret about Dr Grainger

ADA Oh! (*Laughs*) Do tell me

GRAINGER Billy Brentnall!

BRENTNALL I hear you calling me

ADA Do tell me the secret

BRENTNALL Kiss me then (*They kiss—she laughs*) You are awfully jolly (*Kisses her under the ear*) .

ADA (*shaking with laughter*) Don't, don't, oh don't!

BRENTNALL Does my moustache tickle you? Sorry

JACK Nation seize me, did ever you hear?

GRAINGER Such a fool? I'll bet you never did

ADA Tell me that secret

BRETNALL George has got another girl

ADA Who? Where?

GRAINGER Oh, cheese it, Billy

BRETNALL Sally Magneer

GRAINGER Damn you

ADA No!

BRETNALL Fact! She told me herself

JACK What's that, George?

GRAINGER (*to BRETNALL*) Liar!

BRETNALL It's the truth—mine's pistols

JACK You're a devil, George, you're a devil

GRAINGER (*bitterly*) I am that!

EMILY And what is Mr Brentnall?

JACK (*shaking his head*) Nay, I'm not going to say (*He rises heavily, draws EMILY after him, and goes out of the room*)

BRETNALL (*rising*) Well, this newspaper's no more good

ADA There's a fire in the drawing-room—and real screens there

BRETNALL And Jack *does* occupy *himself* Right you are

GRAINGER Chuck it, Billy

BRETNALL What?

GRAINGER None o' that

BRETNALL Well, I'll go to——

GRAINGER I've no doubt

ANNIE Dr Grainger is afraid of being left alone he must have some one to protect him

BRETNALL What from?

ANNIE Presumably from me (*To GRAINGER*) Will you go down with Ada to the drawing-room? Ada, do you mind?

ADA Not at all (*Exit ADA*)

GRAINGER (*bitterly*) Very nice of you, Annie, very nice of you (*Exit GRAINGER*)

BRETNALL and ANNIE *seat themselves*

ANNIE What do you think of all this, Mr Brentnall?

BRETNALL Why, it's a mere lark Jack is really courting Emily, and Ada is sheer mischief, and I'm quite decent, really

ANNIE Are you really?

BRETNALL Judge from your own instinct

ANNIE I think you are—and is Dr Grainger?

BRETNALL What do you think?

ANNIE There is something not nice about him

BRETNALL Has he been courting you?

ANNIE (*drawing herself up*) Well——!

BRETNALL You see, it's a pity——

ANNIE What is a pity?

BRETNALL Why——shall I say just what I think——?

ANNIE I want you to

BRETNALL Well then—it's a pity that girls like you—you are over thirty?

ANNIE Yes

BRETNALL It's a pity that so many of the best women let their youth slip by, because they don't find a man good enough—and then, when dissatisfaction becomes a torture—later on—you are dissatisfied with life, you do lack something big

ANNIE Yes

BRETNALL When it comes to that stage, the want of a man is a torture to you And since the common men make the advances——

ANNIE Yes!

BRETNALL (*putting his arm round her and kissing her*) You are either driven to a kind of degradation, or you go nearly, slightly mad from want——

ANNIE Yes!

BRETNALL (*kissing her*) If you want love from men like Grainger, take it for what it's worth—because we're made so that either we must have love, or starve and go slightly mad

ANNIE But I don't want that kind of love

BRETNALL But do be honest with yourself Don't cause a split between your conscious self and your unconscious—that is insanity You do want love, almost any sort Make up your mind what you'll accept, or what you won't, but keep your ideal intact Whatever men you take, keep the idea of man intact let your soul wait whether your body does or not But don't drag the first down to the second Do you understand?

ANNIE I could love you

BRETNALL But I am going away in a day or two, and most probably shall not be here again—and I am engaged You see, so many women are too good for the men, that for every decent man, there are thirty decent women And you decent women go and

waste and wither away Do think it out square, and make the best of it Virginity and all that is no good to you

ANNIE And what would you advise?

BRENTNALL Know men, and have men, if you must But keep your soul virgin, wait and believe in the *good* man you may never have

ANNIE It is not very—what made Dr Grainger so queer to-night?

BRENTNALL Because he's married

ANNIE I *felt* it—to whom?

BRENTNALL A girl in Wolverhampton—married last January, a son in March, now it's June

ANNIE Oh, the liar!—And what sort of girl?

BRENTNALL Decent, I believe

ANNIE Does she love him?

BRENTNALL Yes

ANNIE The brute—the——

BRENTNALL He doesn't love her, you see——

ANNIE It makes it no better—and she doesn't know how he's——

BRENTNALL Of course not

ANNIE I wonder if I know her—what's her name?

BRENTNALL Marson—her people are tailors in Broad Street

ANNIE No, I don't know her!—But to think——

BRENTNALL Don't be too ready to blame

ANNIE You men are all alike

BRENTNALL Not true—who is coming?

ANNIE I don't know

Enter SALLY MAGNEER—a very big, strapping farmer's daughter, evidently moderately well off

SALLY Good evening—Jack here?

ANNIE Good evening Yes, I believe he's in the drawing-room with Dr Grainger

SALLY That's how you arrange it, is it? (To BRENTNALL) Nice, isn't it?

BRENTNALL Very nice

SALLY Who else is in the drawing-room?

ANNIE My sisters I believe they're having some music

SALLY They don't make much noise over it, anyway Can I go and see?

ANNIE Certainly

BRENTNALL *opens the door for her, and whistles quickly a private call—repeats it* GRAINGER'S whistle is heard in answer

SALLY Alright, I won't drop in on you too sudden (*Exit SALLY*)

ANNIE What impertinence!

BRENTNALL (*laughing*) She's made a dead set at Grainger. If he weren't married, she'd get him

ANNIE How disgusting!

BRENTNALL Maybe—but a woman who determines soon enough to get married, succeeds. Delay is fatal—and marriage is beastly, on most occasions

ANNIE I will go to the drawing-room. Will you excuse me? (*Exit*

ANNIE BRENTNALL *pours himself a drink* Enter GRAINGER)

GRAINGER What the hell have you been up to?

BRENTNALL What the hell have you been up to?

GRAINGER What have you been stuffing into Annie?

BRENTNALL What have you been stuffing into Ada?

GRAINGER Nothing, you devil

BRENTNALL Nothing, you devil

GRAINGER What's Sally after?

BRENTNALL You

GRAINGER She ought to be shot

BRENTNALL So ought you

Enter JACK

JACK What the hell's up to-night?

BRENTNALL My tail, and George's dander and your—but what's Miss Magneer after?

JACK That's what I want to know. You know George here, he's a devil. He's been on wi' some little game with our Sally

GRAINGER You sweet liar, Jack

JACK Now George, what is it?

GRAINGER Nothing, Jack. Sally's taken a fancy to me, an' gives me no chance. Can't you see for yourself?

JACK I can, George—an' tha shanner be pestered

GRAINGER There's Charlie Greenhalgh won't speak to me now—thinks I'm running him off. I've no desire to run Charlie off

JACK Sally's as good as you, George

GRAINGER Maybe, and a thousand times better. But that doesn't say as I want to marry her

JACK No, George, no, that is so, lad

Enter SALLY and the other ladies

SALLY How would you arrange six folks in three chairs——?

GRAINGER Couldn't do it

SALLY I don't think! What's your opinion, Ada?

ADA Why am I asked for my opinion? I've never sat in a chair with Dr Grainger

SALLY Where have you sat then?

ADA I may have sat on his knee while he sat in the chair

SALLY Here, young man, explain yourself

GRAINGER Well, I'll be damned!

BRETNALL Sooner or later

JACK Now look here, our Sally, we're havin' none o' this Charlie Greenhalgh is your man, you stick to him, and leave other young fellows alone

SALLY Oh you *are* good, Jack! And what about the girl you took to Blackpool?

JACK Say no more, Sally, now say no more

SALLY No, I won't Do you want me to drive you up to Selson, because th' cart's at the door?

JACK No, we'll walk up

GRAINGER I dunno, Jack It's getting late, and I believe Billy's tired He's a convalescent, you know

JACK Never thought of it, lad Sorry—sorry

They bid good night Exit SALLY and GRAINGER, EMILY,

JACK, and ADA

ANNIE Isn't he a thing!

BRETNALL He's not bad—do be honest

ANNIE Oh *but*!

BRETNALL Remember what I say—don't starve yourself, and don't degrade the idea of men

ANNIE And shall I never see you again?

BRETNALL If I can, I will come again

ANNIE Good-bye

He kisses her rather sorrowfully, and departs ANNIE CALLADINE closes the door—drinks the last drain from his glass—weeps—dries her eyes as the girls come upstairs There is a calling of good-bye from outside

ADA What's amiss?

ANNIE Plenty

EMILY What?

ANNIE Dr Grainger is only married and got a child

ADA and EMILY No—where—is his wife living?

ANNIE His wife is at her home, in Wolverhampton—Broad Street

ADA I'll write to her—I will—I will

ANNIE No, Ada—no

ADA I will—I will—I will “Dear Mrs George Crainger come and look after your husband He is running the rig out here and if you don't come quick——”

She has flung her writing case on to the table, and sits down to write Vain cries of “Ada,” “Ada,” from ANNIE CALLADINE

CURTAIN

BLACKMORE (*appearing in the scullery doorway with the towel*)

What's that—the lamp-glass?

JACK I never knowed Mr Blackmore was here

BLACKMORE (*to MRS HOLROYD*) Have you got another?

MRS HOLROYD No (*There is silence for a moment*) We can manage with a candle for to-night

BLACKMORE (*stepping forward and blowing out the smoky flame*)

I'll see if I can't get you one from the pit I shan't be a minute

MRS HOLROYD Don't—don't bother—I don't want you to

He, however, unscrews the burner and goes

MINNIE Did Mr Blackmore come for tea, mam?

MRS HOLROYD No, he's had no tea

JACK I bet he's hungry Can I have some bread?

MRS HOLROYD (*she stands a lighted candle on the table*) Yes, and you can get your boots off to go to bed

JACK It's not seven o'clock yet

MRS HOLROYD It doesn't matter

MINNIE What do they wear paper bonnets for, mam?

MRS HOLROYD Because they're brazen hussies

JACK I saw them having a glass of beer

MRS HOLROYD A nice crew!

JACK They say they are old pals of Mrs Meakins You could hear her screaming o' laughin', an' my dad says "He-ah, missis—here—a dog's-nose for the Dachess—hopin' it'll smell samthing"—What's a dog's-nose?

MRS HOLROYD (*giving him a piece of bread and butter*) Don't ask me, child How should I know?

MINNIE Would she eat it, mam?

MRS HOLROYD Eat what?

MINNIE Her in the pink bonnet—eat the dog's-nose?

MRS HOLROYD No, of course not How should I know what a dog's-nose is?

JACK I bet he'll never go to work to-morrow, mother—will he?

MRS HOLROYD Goodness knows I'm sick of it—disgracing me There'll be the whole place cackling *this* now They've no sooner finished about him getting taken up for fighting than they begin on this But I'll put a stop to it some road or other It's not going on, if I know it it isn't

She stops, hearing footsteps, and BLACKMORE enters

ACT III

The kitchen at MAGNEER'S farm SALLY MAGNEER, EMILY CALLADINE, ADA CALLADINE MR MAGNEER, farmer, not fat, but well looking grey hair, black moustache, at present rather maudlin JACK MAGNEER, still in riding breeches and leggings GRAINGER and BRENTNALL, both in tennis flannels JACK and EMILY sit together on a large old couch, GRAINGER next to them SALLY is in a chair, looking as if any moment she would take wing BRENTNALL is flirting with ADA CALLADINE

MR MAGNEER An' so you really goin' ter leave us, Dr Grainger
GRAINGER That is so, Mr Magneer

MR MAGNEER An' when might you be goin'?

GRAINGER Saturday

MR MAGNEER To-morrow! My word, that's sharp Well, I know one as'll be sorry you goin'

SALLY Shut up, Father (*She giggles, and twists her handkerchief to GRAINGER* We s'll be seeing you again, though?

GRAINGER Well, I really can't say—I'm going to London

SALLY London! Whatever are you going there for?

BRENTNALL Set up a wife and family

SALLY What, all at once?—Give us a chance

BRENTNALL Not a ghost of a chance, Sally

ADA CALLADINE *laughs uncontrollably*

GRAINGER Got a joke over there?

ADA (*laughing*) Yes—yes—yes!

SALLY (*jumping up*) Just look at your glass! (*Takes GRAINGER'S tumbler and proceeds to mix him rum*) Why ever didn't you speak?

MR MAGNEER Yes, you must shout up when you're emp'y

SALLY (*to GRAINGER*) Like it sweet?

GRAINGER (*ironically*) Not too much

SALLY (*taking the glass and standing in front of him*) How's this for you?

GRAINGER (*sipping*) Quite alright, thank you, Sally

MR MAGNEER (*laughing*) "Quite alright," hark ye! It's "quite alright" (*He gives a great wink at BRETNALL. SALLY begins to giggle*)

GRAINGER (*lugubriously*) Sally's got 'em again

JACK Sit you down, Sally, an' don't look so long o' th' leg

SALLY *giggles half hysterically, and sinks beside GRAINGER, who edges away. She leans towards him—laughs uncontrollably*

MR MAGNEER Now we're comin' on. What yer doin' at 'er, Doctor?

GRAINGER Begad, I'm doing nothing, Mr Magneer. I dunno what's got her

MR MAGNEER (*laughs*) He dunno, doesn't know what's got her (*To BRETNALL*) We don't, do we?

BRETNALL Not a bit

GRAINGER I'll have a drop more water (*Rises and goes to table*)

MR MAGNEER Come Sally, my lass, come

SALLY *dries her eyes, still giggles, rises* GRAINGER *hastily takes an odd chair at the table. She stands beside him*

JACK Are ter goin' ter sit thysen down, Sally?

SALLY Am I hurtin' you by standin'?

JACK Yis, you are

BRETNALL Fill me up, Sally, there's a dear (*SALLY takes his glass*)

MR MAGNEER Sally Magneer, there's a dear

GRAINGER Isn't Charlie coming?

SALLY No, did you want him?

GRAINGER No—but I thought you did

SALLY (*beginning to giggle*) Did you? You happen thought wrong

BRETNALL Poor Charlie

SALLY What do you know about him?

BRETNALL Now Sally! It's best to be on with the new love before you're off with the old

SALLY (*giggling*) I don't know what you mean

JACK Art thou going to sit down?

SALLY Yes (*Retires discomfited to the couch*)

BRETNALL (*rising*) I'll get a light

GRAINGER Matches?

BRETNALL (*going to fire*) Never mind (*Lights his cigarette with a spill*)

ADA (*laughing*) Good-bye, Billy

BRENTNALL (*blowing her kisses*) Farewell, farewell (*Sinks on the couch beside SALLY*)

SALLY What have you come for?

BRENTNALL Won't you have me, Sally?

SALLY I don't know

GRAINGER (*shuffling the cards*) A hand of crib, Mr Magneer?

MR MAGNEER I don't mind if I do Fill up

BRENTNALL (*taking SALLY's hand*) Hurt your finger?

SALLY My thumb

BRENTNALL Shame! What did you do?

SALLY Chopped it

BRENTNALL How rotten Is it getting better?

MR MAGNEER There's a bit o' proud flesh in it

GRAINGER Your crib, Mr Magneer

SALLY (*unwinding the bandage*) Yes, it's going on alright now

BRENTNALL (*examining it closely*) Yes, that's healing right enough, but a nasty gash! What did Charlie say to it?

SALLY Charlie!

BRENTNALL Yes, Charlie He's your fellow, isn't he?

SALLY I don't know so much about that

BRENTNALL I heard you were as good as engaged

SALLY Oh, did you—who's been telling you?

BRENTNALL Mrs Plum

SALLY She knows so much, you see

BRENTNALL Let me wrap it up for you (*Bandages her thumb*) But isn't it right?

SALLY Not as I know of

BRENTNALL Oh, I'm sorry

SALLY Who are you sorry for?

BRENTNALL Charlie, of course, poor devil

SALLY You needn't be sorry for him Take your sorrow where your love lies

BRENTNALL Then I s'll have to be sorry for you, Sally

SALLY I don't think

BRENTNALL (*putting his arm round her waist*) I'm sorry you've got a bad finger, Sally

SALLY (*beginning to giggle*) Are you?

BRENTNALL You don't mind that I'm not Dr Grainger, do you, Sally?

SALLY What do you mean?

BRENTNALL You'd as leave have me as Dr Grainger?

SALLY Yes, if you like

BRENTNALL (*kissing her*) That's right (*She giggles*)

MR MAGNEER Whey! Whey—up! Sally, thou scaw drag!

SALLY (*giggling hysterically*) What am I a scaw drag for?

MR MAGNEER Hark ye, hark ye! Jack, art takin' notice over there?

JACK Billy's alright, Dad

MR MAGNEER Billy? By gosh! Billy!

GRAINGER Turn, Mr Magneer

ADA (*pegging*) Two for his knobs

BRENTNALL You'd as leave have me as Dr Grainger? (*Kisses her under the ear*)

SALLY (*with suppressed shrieks*) Oh, oh, don't tickle!

GRAINGER (*turning around—with contempt*) She'll never stop,

Billy, she's got gigglemania

MR MAGNEER Giggolo—what? That's a good 'un!

BRENTNALL Yes, she will stop—take me seriously, Sally, do!

(*Squeezes her—SALLY giggles wildly Her head rolls*)

MR MAGNEER Hark at that—take him seriously!

SALLY (*exhausted*) Don't! Don't! Oh don't!

BRENTNALL Sally, my dear, you are too discouraging for anything

Sit with me nicely

SALLY Oh! (*Lays her head on his shoulder*)

BRENTNALL Now we're coming on (*Kisses her*) You've not chipped with Charlie, have you?

SALLY What d'you want to know for?

BRENTNALL Sally, my darling

MR MAGNEER Gosh, it's come to "darling"—"darling Sally"!

BRENTNALL You haven't, have you?

SALLY No

BRENTNALL Why hasn't he come to-night?

SALLY Because he wasn't asked

BRENTNALL Has he cooled off lately?

SALLY I don't care whether he has or not

BRENTNALL Neither do I (*Kisses her under the ear She squeals*)

JACK God love you, Sally!

ADA Don't play cribbage any more, Mr Magneer Do play the comb-band

MR MAGNEER (*throwing away his cards*) No, I won't play any more Fill up an' let's have a dance

ADA Yes, yes, yes!

The men drink—SALLY and GRAINGER push aside the table
GRAINGER Comb-band, Mr Magneer?

MR MAGNEER (*wrapping the comb in tissue paper*) That's the very item (*He staggers slightly—all the men are affected by drink*)

SALLY (*to GRAINGER*) You're going to have one with me?

GRAINGER (*awkwardly*) Er—I'd promised Ada

ADA That doesn't matter Mr Brentnall will dance with me

MR MAGNEER (*sounding the comb*) Now then, are you ready?
Sally's the belle of the ball, and you, Doctor, it's your party—so lead off

GRAINGER Polka—plain polka

BRENTNALL We shan't have breath to speak a word

SALLY Oh my goodness!

The comb-band buzzes away—they start to dance in a prancing fashion

SALLY You're not going to leave me?

GRAINGER I s'll have to

SALLY But you can't

GRAINGER Why not?

SALLY You can't leave me now

GRAINGER But I've got to go to London——

JACK Do you reckon you're really fond of me?

EMILY I know I am—I don't reckon

JACK Not so very good——

EMILY Why not?

JACK Do you reckon you've been nice to me all this while?

EMILY All what while?

JACK While I've been coming to see you

EMILY And have you been very nice to me, Jack?

JACK Well, haven't I?

EMILY No, Jack, you haven't

JACK What do you mean?

ADA I posted her the letter yesterday

BRENTNALL Why, did you know the address?

ADA Yes, you told Annie

BRENTNALL Did I? Oh Lord, you little imp

ADA It's our turn now

BRENTNALL Whose turn?

ADA The women's

BRENTNALL Don't be a vixen——

GRAINGER Well, you won't say anything, will you? You see how I'm fixed

SALLY I don't know

GRAINGER I'll see you to-morrow—keep it back till then

SALLY You'll see me to-morrow?

GRAINGER Yes——

JACK You think I ought to get engaged to you?

EMILY Or else you ought never to have come as you have—you had the option

JACK I dunna want to get married, somehow, Emily

EMILY Is that final, Jack?

JACK What do you say?

EMILY You leave me nothing to say

JACK Good God, Emily, I'm not a brute

EMILY I've heard you say so often, Jack But you don't think it's been very happy for me—our—our friendship?

JACK Good God, Emily—have I been——?

EMILY Afraid of me, Jack It's rather humiliating

JACK You can have me if you like—I'm not good enough——

EMILY You know I consider you good enough

JACK Yis—I know you do

EMILY Men lack honour nowadays

JACK Good God!

They dance—SALLY suddenly drops exhausted on a couch—

GRAINGER moves to the other side of the room JACK MAGNEER flings off his coat

JACK By the Lord, it's hot work! Take your coat off George

GRAINGER and BRENTNALL take off their coats

MR MAGNEER My word, you went well! Have a drink

SALLY Is th' door open? Set the back door open, Jack

He goes out and returns

BRENTNALL Have the next with me, Sally

SALLY I will if you like

ADA What shall it be?

BRETNALL Waltz Valeta

GRAINGER Try a tune, Mr Magneer

MR MAGNEER, *having repapered his comb, tries a tune*

GRAINGER *instructs him* They start off, SALLY with BRETNALL,

GRAINGER with ADA CALLADINE

BRETNALL Why would you rather dance with Dr Grainger?

SALLY I wouldn't

BRETNALL Yes, you would Don't forget the two shuffle steps—
one—two!

SALLY I've never done that before

BRETNALL Something I've taught you then But why would you
rather dance with Grainger?

SALLY I wouldn't

BRETNALL You would

SALLY I wouldn't

BRETNALL You would You're in love with him

SALLY Me! That I never am!

BRETNALL You are!

SALLY Well, I never did!

BRETNALL And you're a fool to be in love with him

SALLY Why?

BRETNALL For the best of all reasons

SALLY What's that?

BRETNALL Because he's married

SALLY He's not!

BRETNALL He is—and has got a son

SALLY Where?

BRETNALL In Wolverhampton, where he came from

SALLY Oh, let's sit down

BRETNALL No, you must dance with me Don't you like to dance
with me? It's too bad, Sally

SALLY I'm getting dizzy

BRETNALL You can't, not in Valeta Besides, we'll walk the waltz
steps (*He puts his arm around her*)

SALLY It's not right about Dr Grainger, is it?

A LADY *in motor cloak and wrap appears in the doorway*
The men, slightly tipsy, bend talking to their partners, who are
engrossed No one notices the newcomer

BRETNALL It is, on my honour You believe me, Sally ?

She looks him earnestly in the face, as they dance the forward step When they come together for the waltz, he kisses her

You believe me ?

SALLY *(almost in tears)* Yes

BRETNALL It is true Poor Sally *(kisses her again They begin to laugh)*

JACK Alright, I niver looked at it in that light

EMILY I know you didn't

JACK We'll count as we're engaged from now, then ?

EMILY What will your father say ?

JACK He'll be just fussy

EMILY I want him to know—I am so fond of him

ADA Oh !

GRAINGER What ?

They break apart JACK and BRETNALL keep on dancing, the latter kissing SALLY GRAINGER goes unsteadily to the doorway

THE LADY I called to see Mr Brentnall—but don't disturb him, he looks so happy

GRAINGER Does—does he know you ?

THE LADY A little *(She laughs)*

GRAINGER Billy ! Billy !

BRETNALL *(looking up)* What now ? *(Sees the lady)* No !

He leaves SALLY—she sways, he catches her again, takes her to a seat, draws his fingers across her cheek caressingly, and goes to the doorway, reeling slightly

Quite giddy, don't you know ! Space is so small

THE LADY Not much room for you to spread out, was there ?

BRETNALL Was I hugging Sally ?

THE LADY Sally ! How lovely, how perfectly lovely !

BRETNALL Did I kiss her ?

THE LADY “Did I kiss her ?” No, no, you poor dear, you didn't kiss her

BRETNALL You mean I am drunk

THE LADY Are you drunk ? No !

BRETNALL I am slightly tipsy, more with dancing than drink.
Shall I come away ?

THE LADY Shall he come away—oh, you dear! Why should I decide for you?

BRENTNALL Are you cross?

THE LADY Not in the least Go and kiss Sally if you will

BRENTNALL Poor Sally—I don't want to kiss her now

THE LADY How perfectly lovely! Do introduce me

BRENTNALL Mr Magneer, Sally Magneer, Emily Calladine, Ada Calladine, Jack Magneer, Dr Grainger—all of you, Elsa Smith

ELSA How awfully nice! Can I come in?

MR MAGNEER (*springing up and bowing tipsily*) Make yourself at 'ome, you're very welcome, Miss, you're very welcome

ELSA Thank you so much! I should love to dance I've got two friends in the motor car May I fetch them?

MR MAGNEER Anybody you like, they're *all* welcome here, and there's plenty to drink for all

ELSA So nice!

Exit ELSA

GRAINGER Who the devil—

BRENTNALL My betrothed, my fiancée my girl

CHORUS OF WOMEN You don't mean it!

SALLY Well! Men—!

ADA *Men?*

EMILY *Men!*

MR MAGNEER Ooh—you're done this time, Billy!

GRAINGER Well, you devil, Billy Brentnall!

JACK It's a corker, Billy, it's a winder

EMILY Are you any better, Jack?

JACK (*fiercely*) Look here, Dad I'm engaged to Emily here, fair and square

MR MAGNEER Come here, Em'ler my ducky, come hither (*EMILY goes very reluctantly He kisses her*) I like thee, Em'ler, I like thee (*Kisses her again*)

JACK Cheese it, Dad

MR MAGNEER It's a winder, it is an' all—An' aren't you goin' to be engaged an' all, Dr Grainger?

GRAINGER Not this time

MR MAGNEER Hm! 'Appen you are engaged!

GRAINGER No, I'm not

MR MAGNEER Come then, come then, come then

Re-enter ELSA SMITH, *with a lady and gentleman*

ELSA All of you—Gladys and Tom Gladys—That's Will——

MR MAGNEER Ay, ay, Billy! Billy! (*It amuses him highly*)

BRENTNALL (*bowing*) I was to come to dinner to-night, I clean forgot Don't be angry

TOM Cheek, if no more

ELSA Oh, you don't know Will, you don't

MR MAGNEER An you don't know Billy, Miss, it strikes me
(*Laughter*)

BRENTNALL Leave me alone—I say, Elsa, Jack (*pointing*) has just got engaged to Emily

ELSA How perfectly charming I love it all so much

BRENTNALL What?

ELSA You—this

BRENTNALL Take your cloak off

Helps her She is a handsome woman, large, blonde about 30—dressed for dinner Tom and Gladys disrobe—they are in dinner dress also

TOM (*cynically*) I suppose these are adventures

GLADYS Don't be a fool, Tom

ELSA This is fun

BRENTNALL Will you dance with me, Elsa?

ELSA No, I won't

BRENTNALL Angry with me?

ELSA No I can dance with you any day

GRAINGER May I have the pleasure?

ELSA No—forgive me (*very kindly*)—but I do want to dance with Jack (*To EMILY*) May I?

EMILY Certainly (*JACK pulls a face*)

ELSA He doesn't want me—but I won't let him off—no

JACK I'm shy, as a matter of fact

ELSA How lovely!

MR MAGNEER (*to GLADYS*) Now Miss, you choose

GLADYS Will, you must dance with me

BRENTNALL (*going to her side*) You are shy

MR MAGNEER Now Ada, your turn to pick

ADA looks wickedly at TOM—he bows

TOM Thank you

ADA Are you shy? (*She laughs wickedly*)

BLACKMORE Here we are then—got one all right

MINNIE Did they give it you, Mr Blackmore?

BLACKMORE No, I took it

He screws on the burner and proceeds to light the lamp He is a tall, slender, mobile man of twenty-seven, brown-haired, dressed in blue overalls JACK HOLROYD is a big, dark, ruddy, lusty lad MINNIE is also big, but fair

MINNIE What do you wear blue trousers for, Mr Blackmore?

BLACKMORE They're to keep my other trousers from getting greasy

MINNIE Why don't you wear pit-breeches, like dad's?

JACK 'Cause he's a 'lectrician Could you make me a little injun what would make electric light?

BLACKMORE I will, some day

JACK When?

MINNIE Why don't you come an' live here?

BLACKMORE (*looking swiftly at MRS HOLROYD*) Nay, you've got your own dad to live here

MINNIE (*plaintively*) Well, you could come as well Dad shouts when we've gone to bed, an' thumps the table He wouldn't if you was here

JACK He dursn't—

MRS HOLROYD Be quiet now, be quiet Here, Mr Blackmore (*She again gives him the sheet to fold*)

BLACKMORE Your hands are cold

MRS HOLROYD Are they?—I didn't know

BLACKMORE *puts his hand on hers*

MRS HOLROYD (*confusedly, looking aside*) You must want your tea

BLACKMORE I'm in no hurry

MRS HOLROYD Selvidge to selvidge You'll be quite a domestic man, if you go on

BLACKMORE Ay

They fold the two sheets

BLACKMORE They are white, your sheets!

MRS HOLROYD But look at the smuts on them—look! This vile hole! I'd never have come to live here, in all the thick of the pit-grime, and lonely, if it hadn't been for him, so that he shouldn't call in a public-house on his road home from work And now he slinks past on the other side of the railway, and goes down to the New Inn

MR MAGNEER Now for Dr Grainger (*He holds his fists to EMILY*)
Which of 'em? (*EMILY touches the right fist*) Wrong! (*Showing
a coin in his left*) Sally gets him

SALLY Sally doesn't

GRAINGER Come on, Sally

MR MAGNEER Now then, what is it?

BRETNALL Waltz

*The comb begins to buzz—the partners set off dancing—MR
MAGNEER breaks the time—they laugh—he beckons EMILY,
holds the comb in one hand, her with the other, and dances
prancingly, buzzing breathlessly*

CURTAIN

ACT IV

The bedroom in the cottage, same as Act I It is nine o'clock in the morning GRAINGER and BRETNALL are in bed

GRAINGER Billy! *(No answer)* You mean to say you're at it yet?
(No answer) Well, I'll be damned, you're a better sleeper even
than a har *(No answer)* Oh strike! *(Shies a pillow at BRETNALL)*

BRETNALL What the——!

GRAINGER I should say so

BRETNALL Dog in the manger! Go to sleep I loathe the small
hours Oh-h! *(Yawns)*

GRAINGER Small hours, begad! It's past nine o'clock

BRETNALL *(half asleep)* Early, frostily early

GRAINGER You mean to say——! *(He shies the bolster, viciously)*

BRETNALL Don't, George! *(Sleeps)*

GRAINGER Devil! *(Shies slippers, one after the other)*

BRETNALL *(sitting up suddenly—furious)* Go to blazes! *(Lies
down again)*

GRAINGER If you go to sleep again, Billy B, I'll empty the water
bottle over you—I will

BRETNALL I'm not asleep

GRAINGER Billy!

BRETNALL What?

GRAINGER Did you square Sally?

BRETNALL Eh?

GRAINGER No, look here, Billy——

BRETNALL *(stretching his arms)* Georgie, you ought to be
dead

GRAINGER I've no doubt Billy Brentnall!

BRETNALL What?

GRAINGER Did you square Sally?

BRETNALL Sally—Sally—Sally——

GRAINGER Chuck it, fool

BRETNALL I don't know

GRAINGER What d'you mean?

BRENTNALL I told her you were a married man with a family, and begad, you look it——

GRAINGER That's not the point

BRENTNALL I apologize I say to Sally "He's a married man" Sally says to me "He's not" I say "He is" Sally says "I'm dizzy" I say "You might well be"

GRAINGER Chuck it, do chuck it

BRENTNALL It's the solemn fact And our confab ended there

GRAINGER It did'

BRENTNALL It did

GRAINGER Hm'

BRENTNALL You're going to London to my rooms, aren't you?

GRAINGER You say so

BRENTNALL Very well then—there's an end of Sally

GRAINGER I'm not so sure

BRENTNALL Why?

GRAINGER She said she was coming round here

BRENTNALL When?

GRAINGER This morning

BRENTNALL Then don't get up till this afternoon, and then belt for the station

GRAINGER I've not settled up at the Surgery

BRENTNALL Thou bungler—has Sally really got a case against you?

GRAINGER She's got a case against *some* man or other, and she'd prefer it to be me

BRENTNALL But she must see *you're* quite a cold egg And has Charlie Greenhalgh really cried off?

GRAINGER No—at least—poor old Charlie's in a bit of a mess

BRENTNALL How?

GRAINGER He was secretary to the football club—and he falsified the balance sheet, and failed to produce about fifteen quid

BRENTNALL *He's* not in a very rosy condition for marriage However, old Magneer's not short of money?

GRAINGER He isn't, begad' .

BRENTNALL Alright—let him work the oracle Sally's no fool—and she'll be just as well, married to Charlie You say his farm is going to the dogs Alright, she'll shoo the dogs off

GRAINGER Very nice

BRENTNALL I think so

GRAINGER Who's that?

BRENTNALL Dunno—get under the bed-clothes

Sound of footsteps—enter JACK MAGNEER

JACK Letting the day get well aired?

BRENTNALL I don't believe in running risks through the chill, damp
air of early morning

JACK I s'd think you don't

BRENTNALL Take a seat

JACK So you're going to-day, George?

GRAINGER I am, Jack—and sorry to leave you

JACK What's this our Sally's been telling me?

GRAINGER Couldn't say, Jack

JACK As you're married—

BRENTNALL And got a kid, quite right

JACK Is it, George?

GRAINGER I believe so

JACK Hm! (*A pause*)

BRENTNALL Well, Jack, say he has your sympathy

JACK Yis—yis—he has But I'm not so sure—

BRENTNALL Eh Jack, it's a hole we might any of us slip into

JACK Seemingly But why didn't you tell me, George?

BRENTNALL Don't, Jack Don't you see, I could give the whole of
that recitation "We've been good friends, George, and you'd no
need to keep me in the dark like that It's a false position for me,
as well as for you, etc, etc" That's what you want to say?

JACK Yis—and besides—

BRENTNALL Well, look here, Jack, you might have done it your-
self George was let in down at Wolverhampton—kicked out of
the town because he owned up and married the girl—hadn't
either a penny or a job—girl has a good home Would you have
wanted to tell the whole story to these prating fools round here?

JACK No, I can't say as I should But then—

BRENTNALL Then what?

JACK There's our Sally, and there's Annie—

BRENTNALL What about 'em?

JACK He's courted 'em both—they're both up to the eyes in love
with him—

BRENTNALL Not Annie On the quiet, she's rather gone on *me* I
showed George up in his true light to her

GRAINGER Rotter—rotter!

BRENTNALL And I stepped into the limelight, and the trick was done

JACK You're a devil, Billy —But look here, George, our Sally——

GRAINGER Yes——

JACK She's—she's gone a long way——

BRENTNALL (*quietly*) How do you mean, Jack?

JACK Well, she's given up Charlie Greenhalgh——

BRENTNALL Not quite And you know, Jack, she really loves Charlie, at the bottom There's something fascinating about George

GRAINGER Damn your eyes, shut up, Billy

BRENTNALL There's something fascinating about George He can't help it The women melt like wax before him They're all over him It's not his beauty, it's his manliness He can't help it

GRAINGER I s'll smash you, Billy Brentnall, if you don't shut up

JACK Yis, there's something in it, George

BRENTNALL There *is*, Jack Well, he can't help himself, so you've got to help him It's no good hitting him when he's down

JACK I'm not hitting him

BRENTNALL And what you've got to do, you've got to get Charlie Greenhalgh and your Sally together again

JACK Me!—It's nowt to do with me

BRENTNALL Yes, it has Charlie's not been up to your place lately, has he?

JACK No

BRENTNALL And do you know why?

JACK Yis

BRENTNALL It's not so much because of George Have you heard what low water he's getting into up at Newmanley? It appears he's fifteen quid out with the football club

JACK I've heard a whisper

BRENTNALL Well, you help him, Jack, for Sally's sake She loves him, Jack, she does And if she married him quick, she'll pull him through, for she seems to have a business head on her, and a farming head

JACK She has that

BRENTNALL Well, you'll do what you can for poor old Charlie, won't you?

JACK I will, Billy And what time are you going?

BRETNALL 2.50 train

JACK Well—me and you's been good pals, George I must say I'd ha' done anything for you—

GRAINGER I know you would, Jack

JACK Yis, an' I would—an' I would

BRETNALL I'm going up to Blythe Hall against Ashbourne for a day or two, Jack Shall you come up for tennis?

JACK I hardly think so—we s'll be busy just now

BRETNALL Sunday afternoon—yes you will

JACK Good-bye, Billy

BRETNALL Au revoir, Jack

JACK Well—good-bye, George—lad We've not done amiss while you've been here I s'll miss thee

GRAINGER You've been alright to me, Jack

JACK Yis—I try to do what I can for folks

Exit JACK

BRETNALL The atmosphere clears, George

GRAINGER Oh damn you, shut up

BRETNALL "Oh, what a sin is base ingratitude!"

GRAINGER What did you tell Annie about me?

BRETNALL I said you were quite manly, and couldn't help yourself, all the virtues of good nature and so on, but a bit of a libidinous goat

GRAINGER Thank you—very nice of you

BRETNALL Add to this that you won't face a situation, but always funk it, and you understand why Annie suddenly transferred her affections to me For I showed myself, by contrast, a paragon of all virtues

GRAINGER You would

BRETNALL I did

GRAINGER I shan't go to London to your rooms

BRETNALL Now George, my dear chap—

GRAINGER I shall not, Billy

BRETNALL Then where will you go?

GRAINGER Hell!

BRETNALL My dear, dear fellow, you've neither the cash nor the ability

GRAINGER Well, you're a——

BRENTNALL Shall we get up?

GRAINGER I will, whether you will or not (*Sits on the side of the bed whistling "On the Banks of Allan Water" Footsteps on the stairs—enter GRAINGER'S wife, ETHEL—rather thin, with a light costume*)

ETHEL George! (*She goes forward and kisses him, not noticing BRENTNALL*) George! (*Sinks her head on his shoulder*) George!

GRAINGER Ethel—well I'm blessed! (*Kisses her*)

ETHEL (*drawing away*) I had to come

GRAINGER Yes

ETHEL Are you angry?

GRAINGER Me angry! What should I be angry for?

ETHEL I thought you might be

GRAINGER What made you come?

ETHEL I heard you were going away—and your letters seemed so constrained Are you——?

GRAINGER What?

ETHEL Going away?

GRAINGER I s'll have to—this job's done

ETHEL You never told me

GRAINGER What was the good?

ETHEL Where are you going?

GRAINGER Dunno—I don't know in the least

ETHEL Oh George, you must come home Mother says you must

GRAINGER Hm!

ETHEL Won't you?

GRAINGER I'd rather not

ETHEL What will you do, then?

GRAINGER I may—I shall probably get a job in London

ETHEL Oh George, don't, don't go to London

GRAINGER What else can I do?

ETHEL Come home to Mother with me

GRAINGER I'll be damned if I will

ETHEL No, you never will do anything I ask you

GRAINGER I shan't do that

ETHEL Don't you want to be with me?

GRAINGER If I want ever so badly, I can't, with no money

ETHEL Then how are you going to live alone, with no money?

GRAINGER I can manage for myself

ETHEL I know what you want, you want to run away. It is mean, mean of you.

GRAINGER What's the good of my coming to your place, there, where they kicked me out?

ETHEL And what if you've nowhere else to go? And what are you going to do in London?

GRAINGER Look for a job.

ETHEL And what when you've got one?

GRAINGER Save up to get some things together.

ETHEL How much have you saved here?

GRAINGER Not a fat lot—but I *have* saved.

ETHEL How much?

GRAINGER Some—at any rate.

ETHEL Have you been miserable? I know you like plenty of life. Has it made you miserable to be tied up?

GRAINGER Not miserable—but it's been a bit of a devil.

ETHEL We ought to live together.

GRAINGER On what?

ETHEL On what we can get.

GRAINGER No, thank you.

ETHEL We might as well not be married. I believe you hate me for having married you. Do you—do you?

GRAINGER Now Ethel, drop it. Don't get excited. You know I don't feel anything of the sort.

ETHEL (*weeping*) But you don't love me.

GRAINGER (*tenderly*) Why, I do, Ethel, I do.

ETHEL I love you, George, I love you.

GRAINGER Poor old Ethel—and I love you. And whoever says I don't, is a liar.

ETHEL You've been true to me, George?

GRAINGER What do you mean?

ETHEL Have you been true to me?

BRETNALL No, he hasn't.

GRAINGER (*fiercely*) Now Billy!

BRETNALL I am your husband's old friend, Brentnall, and your friend, Mrs Grainger. (*Gets out of bed, shakes hands with ETHEL*.)

ETHEL I didn't know you were there.

BRETNALL Never mind. (*Puts on a dressing-gown*.)

ETHEL Do you say George hasn't been true to me?

BRETNALL I do Do you really love him?

ETHEL He is my husband

BRETNALL You do love him, I can see Then, look here, *keep him*
You can do it, I should think *Keep him* And you, George, be
decent

GRAINGER Be decent yourself

BRETNALL I am (*Lights a cigarette*) You don't mind if I
smoke?

ETHEL No George, oh George! It's not true what he says, is it?

GRAINGER No!

ETHEL (*weeping*) I couldn't bear it (*Embracing him*) I couldn't
bear it

BRETNALL (*aside*) That's the ticket

GRAINGER Never mind, little girl—never mind

ETHEL You won't leave me again?

BRETNALL (*aside*) Good shot!

GRAINGER What can I do?

ETHEL I've got seventy pounds, George, I've got seventy pounds

GRAINGER I don't want *your money*, Ethel

ETHEL You don't mind making a fool of me, and neglecting me,
but you won't have my money

GRAINGER Now Ethel—

ETHEL (*flashing*) Isn't it so?

GRAINGER No, Ethel

ETHEL Then we'll live together on seventy pounds, till you get a
job?

GRAINGER But you see—

ETHEL (*turning, flashing, to BRETNALL*) Has he been living straight
—do they know here he's married?

BRETNALL I've told a few of them

ETHEL (*turning slowly to GRAINGER*) Now then—

GRAINGER You can do what the hell you like

ETHEL Then I shall live with you, from this minute onwards

BRETNALL Knocked out, George!

GRAINGER Curse you, Bretznall

BRETNALL You are a rotter, my dear fellow

ETHEL (*weeping*) There's baby crying

Exit ETHEL, *weeping* BRETNALL *smokes a cigarette—*

GRAINGER *fumes*

BRETNALL (*throwing him a dressing-gown*) You'd better clothe yourself—you'll feel stronger

GRAINGER (*getting into the dressing-gown*) What d'you reckon you're up to?

BRETNALL *Don't* be a fool, George, *don't* be a swine. If you're going to clear out, stand up and say so honourably! Say you'll not abide by your marriage. You *can* do that, with decency

GRAINGER How the devil can I?

BRETNALL *Will* you?

GRAINGER No, damn it, how can I? I'm not a——

BRETNALL Very well then, you won't clear out, you won't renounce your marriage. Very well then, go and live with the girl, and be decent. Have a cigarette! (*GRAINGER takes a cigarette*)

GRAINGER It's a cursed rotten hole——

BRETNALL Then for the Lord's sake, make it as comfortable as possible, if you're going to stop in it

GRAINGER Hark!

BRETNALL Sally!

GRAINGER It is, begad!

ETHEL *appears*

ETHEL There's a woman enquiring for you

GRAINGER What for—what does she want?

ETHEL She wants you

GRAINGER Hm! Is it Sally? She's been running after me ever since I've been here, bless her

BRETNALL Let's have her up (*Calling*) Do come upstairs, Miss Magneer. It's quite decent

GRAINGER It's a bit thick, Billy

Enter SALLY

BRETNALL (*to SALLY*) Excuse our appearance, won't you? How do you do? (*Shakes hands*)

SALLY How do you do?

BRETNALL Have you been introduced to Mrs Grainger? Mrs Doctor Grainger—Miss Magneer

SALLY I've been given to understand this is Mrs Doctor Grainger—and that the baby downstairs——

BRETNALL Is Master Jimmy Grainger. Quite so

SALLY I think it is quite so. It's happened quite so, but it's not quite the thing

instead of coming in for his dinner I might as well have stopped in Bestwood

BLACKMORE Though I rather like this little place, standing by itself
MRS HOLROYD Jack, can you go and take the stockings in for me?

They're on the line just below the pigsty The prop's near the apple-tree—mind it Minnie, you take the peg-basket
MINNIE Will there be any rats, mam?

MRS HOLROYD Rats—no They'll be frightened when they hear you, if there are

The children go out

BLACKMORE Poor little beggars!

MRS HOLROYD Do you know, this place is fairly alive with rats They run up that dirty vine in front of the house—I'm always at him to cut it down—and you can hear them at night overhead like a regiment of soldiers tramping Really, you know, I *hate* them

BLACKMORE Well—a rat is a nasty thing!

MRS HOLROYD But I s'll get used to them I'd give anything to be out of this place

BLACKMORE It *is* rotten, when you're tied to a life you don't like But I should miss it if you weren't here When I'm coming down the line to the pit in the morning—it's nearly dark at seven now—I watch the firelight in here Sometimes I put my hand on the wall outside where the chimney runs up to feel it warm There isn't much in Bestwood, is there?

MRS HOLROYD There's less than nothing if you can't be like the rest of them—as common as they're made

BLACKMORE It's a fact—particularly for a woman—But this place is cosy— God love me, I'm sick of lodgings

MRS HOLROYD You'll have to get married—I'm sure there are plenty of nice girls about

BLACKMORE Are there? I never see 'em (*He laughs*)

MRS HOLROYD Oh, come, you can't say that

BLACKMORE I've not seen a single girl—an unmarried girl—that I should want for more than a fortnight—not one

MRS HOLROYD Perhaps you're very particular

She puts her two palms on the table and leans back He draws near to her, dropping his head

BLACKMORE Look here!

He has put his hand on the table near hers

BRENTNALL Don't let us quarrel, Sally. Don't be quarrelling with us the last half-hour we shall be here.

SALLY Perhaps not. But what was he masquerading round as not married for, if he had a wife and a child?

ETHEL You see, Miss Magneer, the fact that Dr Grainger chose to keep his marriage a secret wouldn't have hurt *you*, unless you'd rushed in to be hurt.

SALLY Yes—meaning to say as I ran after him. (*To GRAINGER*) Eh?

GRAINGER Well—what else can you call it, Sally?

SALLY And who wanted me to walk down the fields with him, the first time he saw me?

GRAINGER I must say I think you wanted me quite as much, if not more, than I wanted you, Sally.

SALLY Oh, did I?

ETHEL I have no doubt of it.

SALLY And did every single girl you met want you then, Dr Grainger?

GRAINGER I never said so nor meant so.

SALLY The one downstairs, for instance.

GRAINGER Who d'you mean?

SALLY Annie Calladine.

GRAINGER What's she doing here?

ETHEL She met me at the station. I left her holding baby.

SALLY Let *her* come up, and say *her* share. No, you daren't and you know it.

GRAINGER Daren't I? I say, Annie—Annie!

ANNIE'S VOICE Yes!

GRAINGER Would you mind coming upstairs a minute?

SALLY Now you s'll hear *her* side, as well.

Enter ANNIE

BRENTNALL You will excuse us—we were not expecting callers.

ANNIE How do you do?

GRAINGER Annie, Sally wants you to say everything you can against me, in Ethel's hearing.

ANNIE I don't wish to say everything I can against you, Dr Grainger. But I do wish to say this, that you are a danger to every unmarried girl, when you go about as you *have* gone, here. And Mrs Grainger had better look after you very closely, if she means to keep you.

GRAINGER Thank you, Annie, very nice

ANNIE Almost as nice as you have been to me

GRAINGER I'm not aware that I've done you much damage

ANNIE If you haven't, it's not your fault

ETHEL *flings herself suddenly on the bed weeping wildly*

SALLY I'm thankful I'm not his wife

ANNIE And I am more than thankful

BRETNALL Don't cry, Mrs Grainger George is alright, really

ANNIE (*fiercely*) He is *not*, Mr Brentnall

SALLY Neither is he

BRETNALL Nay, don't cry, Miss Grainger

ELSA SMITH'S VOICE, *calling in a jolly singsong* 'Knabe Knabe, wo bist du?'

BRETNALL *Gott sei dank, du bist gekommen Komm hinauf*

ELSA SMITH'S VOICE *Ja!* (*Runs upstairs—enter, chattering in German*) Oh!

BRETNALL (*shaking hands*) Frightful muddle! Miss Annie Calladine—Mrs Grainger's awfully cut up because George has been flirting round

ELSA With you, Miss Magneer—and Miss Calladine?

SALLY Not to mention the rest

ELSA Oh—oh! I'm sorry But don't cry, Mrs Grainger, please He's not a villain if he makes love to the other girls surely Perhaps it's not *nice* But it was under trying circumstances

BRETNALL That's what I say

ELSA Yes, yes You're just as bad yourself I know you

BRETNALL Nay Elsa, I'm not the same

ELSA Oh, oh—now *don't* try to duck your head in the whitewash pail with me, no I won't have it *Don't* cry, Miss Grainger, don't cry He loves you, I'm sure he does even if he makes love to the others (*To GRAINGER*) Don't you? (*No reply*) Now you are sulking just like a great baby And then that's your *little* baby downstairs? Ah, the dear! (*Sobbing from ETHEL*) Never mind, never mind, cry out your cry, then let me talk to you

BRETNALL Come by motor-car?

ELSA Yes, Will Hobson drove me

BRETNALL Ha!

ELSA I like him so you needn't say "Ha!"

BRETNALL Ha!

ELSA (*laughing—putting her hand on his shoulder*) Not had breakfast, and smoking, and talking to ladies Aren't you ashamed, sir?

BRENTNALL I've nothing to be ashamed of

ELSA (*laughing*) No, no, hear him (*Kisses him*) You are a dear, but a dreadful liar

BRENTNALL Nay, I'll be damned—I beg your pardon

ELSA No, you *never* use bad language, do you?

BRENTNALL Not in the presence of ladies

ELSA Well, now listen, I prefer to have you as you are with *men* If you swear when you are with men, I prefer you to swear when you are with me Will you promise me you will?

BRENTNALL It wouldn't be a hard promise to keep

ELSA Promise me you won't have one philosophy when you are with men, in your smoke-room, and another when you are with me, in the drawing-room Promise me you will be faithful to your philosophy that you have with other men, even before me, always

BRENTNALL Ha! Not so easy

ELSA Promise me I want the real you, not your fiction

BRENTNALL I promise to do my best

ELSA Yes, and I trust you, you are so decent

BRENTNALL Nay, Elsa—

ELSA Yes you are Oh I see your faults, I do But you are decent (*To ETHEL, who has stopped crying, but who still lies on the bed*) Don't be too cross with Dr Grainger, will you, Mrs Grainger? It's not very dreadful Perhaps Miss Magneer loved him a little—

SALLY That I never did—

ELSA (*laughing*) Yes, you did And (*to ANNIE*) you were inclined to love him?

ANNIE That is the worst part of it

ELSA Well, I, who am a woman, when I see other women who are sweet or handsome or charming, I look at them and think "Well, how can a man help loving them, to some extent? Even if he loves *me*, if I am not there, how can he help loving them?"

ANNIE But not a married man

ELSA I think a man ought to be fair He ought to offer his love for just what it is—the love of a man married to another woman—and so on And, if there is any strain, he ought to tell his wife—"I love this other woman "

SALLY It's worse than Mormons

BRENTNALL But better than subterfuge, bestiality, or starvation and sterility

ELSA Yes, yes If only men were decent enough

BRENTNALL And women

ELSA Yes Don't fret, Mrs Grainger By loving these two women, Dr Grainger has not lost any of his love for you I would stay with him ✓

SALLY He certainly never loved me—except for what he could get

ELSA Ha-ha! (*Very quaint and very earnest*) That is rather dreadful But yes, he must have loved you—something in you

SALLY It was something

ELSA Yes, I see what you mean—but I don't think you're quite right No, it's *not quite* so brutal

BRENTNALL Shall I walk across to you after lunch?

ELSA Yes, do that

ANNIE I think I will go Good-bye, Dr Grainger (*Shakes hands*) Good-bye, Sally Good-bye, Mr Brentnall

BRENTNALL Good-bye, Annie Remember what I told you, and decide for the best Don't be afraid (*Kisses her*)

ELSA Yes I think, with a little love, we can help each other so much

ANNIE (*to ELSA*) Good-bye (*Crossing and putting her arms round ETHEL*) He isn't bad, dear You must bring out the best in him The baby is a *dear* And you'll write to me

Exit ANNIE

SALLY Well, good-bye all And if I were your wife Dr Grainger, I'd keep the bit between your teeth

ELSA No, no No one should be driven like a horse between the shafts Each should live his own life, you are there to *help* your husband, not to drive him

SALLY And to watch he doesn't help himself too often Well, good-bye Shall we be seeing you again, Mr Brentnall?

BRENTNALL Next week

SALLY Right—do come Good-bye

Exit SALLY

ELSA (*crossing to ETHEL*) Good-bye Don't make sorrow and trouble in the world, try to make happiness I think Satan is in hard judgment, even more than is sin Try to exonerate

ETHEL It's such a shock

ELSA (*kissing her*) Ah yes, it is cruel But don't let your own suffering blind you, try not to Good-bye (*Kisses her*) Good-bye, Dr Grainger (*Shakes hands*)

BRENTNALL I will see you downstairs—by the way, Grainger and Mrs Grainger are going to stay in my rooms

ELSA How perfectly delightful! Then I shall see you in London How lovely! Good-bye

BRENTNALL I suppose I'm respectable enough to see you downstairs

Exeunt ELSA and BRENTNALL GRAINGER and his wife sit silent a while They are afraid of each other

GRAINGER Will you go to London to Billy's rooms?

ETHEL Does he want us to?

GRAINGER I suppose so

Silence

GRAINGER Will you?

ETHEL Do you want me to?

GRAINGER You please yourself I'm not coming to Wolverhampton

ETHEL (*trying not to cry*) Well, we'll go to London

GRAINGER It's a damned mess

ETHEL (*crying*) You'd better do just as you like, then, and I'll go home

GRAINGER I didn't mean that

ETHEL (*crying*) I'll go home

GRAINGER Don't begin again, Ethel

ETHEL You hate the thought of being married to me So you can be free of me

GRAINGER And what about the baby? Don't talk rot, Ethel (*Puts his arm round her*)

ETHEL You don't care for that, either

GRAINGER Don't I—you don't know They all make me look as black as I can——

ETHEL Well, I don't know

GRAINGER Yes they do—and they always have done I never have had anybody to stick up for me (*Weeps a few tears*) I've had a rotten time, a rotten time

ETHEL And so have I

GRAINGER You don't know what it is to be a man

ETHEL : I know what it is to be your wife.

GRAINGER : Are you going to sling it in my teeth for ever?

ETHEL : No, I'm not. But what did you marry me for? (*Cries*)

GRAINGER (*embracing her*): You're the only girl I could have
married, Ethel. I've been a rotter to you, I have.

ETHEL : Never mind, we *shall* get on together, we shall. Mind, somebody is coming.

A knock—enter MRS PLUM with the baby.

MRS PLUM : He wants you, the precious little lad, he does. Oh Dr Grainger, let me see you hold him! (*Gives the baby to GRAINGER.*)

Enter BRETNALL.

BRETNALL : That's the way, George.

GRAINGER : Shut up, fool.

CURTAIN

The Daughter-in-Law

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

(1912)

CHARACTERS

MRS GASCOIGNE

JOE

MRS PURDY

MINNIE

The action of the play takes place in the kitchen of Luther Gascoigne's new home.

MRS HOLROYD Yes, I know you've got nice hands—but you needn't be vain of them

BLACKMORE No—it's not that— But don't they seem—(*he glances swiftly at her, she turns her head aside, he laughs nervously*)—they sort of go well with one another (*He laughs again*)

MRS HOLROYD They do, rather—

They stand still, near one another, with bent heads, for a moment Suddenly she starts up and draws her hand away

BLACKMORE Why—what is it?

She does not answer The children come in—JACK with an armful of stockings, MINNIE with the basket of pegs

JACK I believe it's freezing, mother

MINNIE Mr Blackmore, could you shoot a rat an' hit it?

BLACKMORE (*laughing*) Shoot the lot of 'em, like a wink

MRS HOLROYD But you've had no tea What an awful shame to keep you here!

BLACKMORE Nay, I don't care It never bothers me

MRS HOLROYD Then you're different from most men

BLACKMORE All men aren't alike, you know

MRS HOLROYD But do go and get some tea

MINNIE (*plaintively*) Can't you stop, Mr Blackmore?

BLACKMORE Why, Minnie?

MINNIE So's we're not frightened Yes, do Will you?

BLACKMORE Frightened of what?

MINNIE 'Cause there's noises, an' rats—an' perhaps dad'll come home and shout

BLACKMORE But he'd shout more if I was here

JACK He doesn't when my uncle John's here So you stop, an' perhaps he won't

BLACKMORE Don't you like him to shout when you're in bed?

They do not answer, but look seriously at him

CURTAIN

ACT I

SCENE I

A collier's kitchen—not poor Windsor chairs, deal table, dresser of painted wood, sofa covered with red cotton stuff Time About half-past two of a winter's afternoon A large, stoutish woman of sixty-five, with smooth black hair parted down the middle of her head MRS GASCOIGNE Enter a young man, about twenty-six, dark, good-looking, has his right arm in a sling, does not take off cap JOE GASCOIGNE

MRS GASCOIGNE Well, I s'd ha' thought thy belly 'ud a browt thee whoam afore this

JOE sits on sofa without answering

Doesn't ter want no dinner?

JOE (*looking up*) I want it if the' is ony

MRS GASCOIGNE An' if the' isna, tha can go be out? Tha talks large, my fine jockey! (*She puts a newspaper on the table, on it a plate and his dinner*) Wheer dost reckon ter's bin?

JOE I've bin ter th' office for my munny

MRS GASCOIGNE Tha's niver bin a' this while at th' office

JOE They kep' me ower an hour, an' then gen me nowt

MRS GASCOIGNE Gen thee nowt! Whv, how do they ma'e that out? It's a wik sin' tha got hurt, an' if a man wi' a broken arm canna ha' his fourteen shillin' a week accident pay, who can, I s'd like to know?

JOE They'll gie me nowt, whether or not

MRS GASCOIGNE An' for why, pritheeth?

JOE (*does not answer for some time, then, sullenly*) They reckon I niver got it while I woi at work

MRS GASCOIGNE Then where did ter get it, might I ax? I'd think they'd like to lay it onto me

JOE Tha talks like a fool, Mother

MRS GASCOIGNE Tha looks like one, me lad

She has given him his dinner, he begins to eat with a fork
Here, hutch up, gammy-leg—gammy-arm

He makes room, she sits by him on the sofa and cuts up his meat for him

It's a rum un as I should start ha'in' babies again, an' feedin' 'em wi' spoon-meat (*Gives him a spoon*) An' now let's hear why they winna gi'e thee thy pay Another o' Macintyre's dirty knivey dodges, I s'd think

JOE They reckon I did it wi' foolery, an' not wi' work

MRS GASCOIGNE Oh indeed! An' what by that?

JOE (*eating*) They wunna gie me nowt, that's a'

MRS GASCOIGNE It's a nice thing! An' what did ter say?

JOE I said nowt

MRS GASCOIGNE Tha wouldna'! Tha stood like a stuffed duck, an' said thank-yer

JOE Well, it wor raight

MRS GASCOIGNE How raight?

JOE I did do it wi' foolery

MRS GASCOIGNE Then what did ter go axin' fer pay fer?

JOE I did it at work, didna I? An' a man as gets accident at work's titled ter disability pay, isna he?

MRS GASCOIGNE Tha said a minnit sin' as tha got it wi' foolery

JOE An' so I did

MRS GASCOIGNE I niver 'eered such talk i' my life

JOE I dunna care what ter's 'eered an' what t'asna I wor foolin' wi' a wringer an' a pick-heft—ta's it as ter's a mind

MRS GASCOIGNE What, down pit?

JOE I' th' stall, at snap time

MRS GASCOIGNE Showin' off a bit, like?

JOE Ye'

MRS GASCOIGNE An' what then?

JOE Th' wringer gen me a rap ower th'arm, an' that's a'

MRS GASCOIGNE An' tha reported it as a accident?

JOE It wor accident, worn't it? I niver did it a'purpose

MRS GASCOIGNE But a pit accident

JOE Well, an' what else wor't? It wor a h'accident I got i' th' pit, i' th' sta' wheer I wor workin'

MRS GASCOIGNE But not *while* tha wor workin'

JOE What by that?—it wor a pit accident as I got i' th' stall

MRS GASCOIGNE But tha didna tell 'em how it happened

JOE I said some stuff fell on my arm, an' brok' it An' worna that trew?

MRS GASCOIGNE It wor very likely trew enough, lad, if on'y they'd ha' believed it

JOE An they would ha' believed it, but for Hewett bully-raggin' Bettesworth 'cos he knowed he was a chappil man (*He imitates the underground manager, Hewett, and Bettesworth, a butty*) "About this accident, Bettesworth How exactly did it occur?" "I couldn't exactly say for certing, sir, because I wasn't linkin' " "Then tell me as near as you can " "Well, Mester, I'm sure I don't know " "That's curious, Bettesworth—I must have a report Do you know anything about it, or don't you? It happened in your stall, you're responsible for it, and I'm responsible for you " "Well, Gaffer, what's ight's right, I suppose, ter th' mesters or th' men An' 'e wor conjurin' a' snap-time wi' a pick-heft an' a wringer, an' the wringer catched 'im ower th' arm " "I thought you didn't know " "I said *for certain*—I didn't see exactly how 'twas done

MRS GASCOIGNE Hm

JOE Bettesworth 'ud non ha' clat-fasted but for nosy Hewett He says, "Yo know, Joseph, when he says to me, 'Do you know anything about that haccident?'—then I says to myself, 'Take not the word of truth hutterly outer thy mouth' "

MRS GASCOIGNE If he took a bit o' slaver ouden's mouth, it 'ud do

JOE So this mornin' when I went ter th' office, Mester Salmon he com out an' said " 'Ow did this haccident occur, Joseph? " and I said, "Some stuff fell on't " So he says, "Stuff fell on't, stuff fell on't! You mean coal or rock or what? " So I says, "Well, it worn't a thipenny bit " "No," he says, "but what was it? " "It wor a piece o' clunch," I says "You don't use clunch for wringers," he says, "do you? " "The wringin' of the nose bringeth forth blood," I says—

MRS GASCOIGNE Why, you know you never did (*She begins making a pudding*)

JOE No—b'r I'd ha' meant t'r'a done

MRS GASCOIGNE We know thee! Tha's done thysen one i' th' eye this time When dost think tha'll iver get ter be a butty, at this rate? There's Luther nowt b'r a day man yet

JOE I'd as lief be a day man as a butty, i' pits that rat-gnawed there's hardly a stall worth havin', an' a company as 'ud like yer ter scrape yer tabs afore you went home, for fear you took a grain o' coal

MRS GASCOIGNE Maybe—but tha's got ter get thy livin' by 'em

JOE I hanna I s'll go to Australia

MRS GASCOIGNE Tha'lt do no such thing, while I'm o' this earth

JOE Ah, but though, I shall—else get married, like our Luther

MRS GASCOIGNE A fat sight better off tha'lt be for that

JOE You niver know, Mother, dun yer?

MRS GASCOIGNE You dunna, me lad—not till yer find yerself let in Marriage is like a mouse-trap, for either man or woman You've soon come to th' end o' th' cheese

JOE Well, ha'ef a loaf's better nor no bread

MRS GASCOIGNE Why, wheer's th' loaf as tha'd like ter gnawg a' thy life?

JOE Nay, nowhere yet

MRS GASCOIGNE Well, dunna thee talk, then Tha's done thysen harm enow for one day, wi' thy tongue

JOE An' good as well, Mother—I've aten my dinner, a'most

MRS GASCOIGNE An' swilled thy belly afore that, methinks

JOE Niver i' this world!

MRS GASCOIGNE And I've got thee to keep on ten shillin's a wik club-money, han I?

JOE Tha needna, if ter doesna want Besides, we s'll be out on strike afore we know wheer we are

MRS GASCOIGNE I'm sure You've on'y bin in——

JOE Now, Mother, spit on thy hands an' ta'e fresh hold We s'll be out on strike in a wik or a fortnit——

MRS GASCOIGNE Strike's a' they're fit for—a pack o' slutherers as

Her words tail off as she goes into pantry

JOE (to himself) Tha goes chunterin' i' th' pantry when somebody's at th' door (Rises, goes to door)

MRS PURDY'S VOICE Is your mother in?

JOE Y1, 'er's in right enough

MRS PURDY Well, then, can I speak to her?

JOE (calling) Mrs Purdy wants ter speak to thee, Mother

MRS GASCOIGNE *crosses the kitchen heavily, with a dripping-pan, stands in doorway*

MRS GASCOIGNE Good afternoon

MRS PURDY Good afternoon

MRS GASCOIGNE Er—what is it?

MRS PURDY *enters* *She is a little fat, red-faced body in bonnet and black cape*

MRS PURDY I wanted to speak to yer rather pertickler

MRS GASCOIGNE *(giving way)* Oh, yes?

ALL THREE *enter the kitchen* MRS PURDY *stands near the door*

MRS PURDY *(nodding at JOE)* Has he had a haccident?

MRS GASCOIGNE Broke his arm

MRS PURDY Oh my! that's nasty When did 'e do that?

MRS GASCOIGNE A wik sin' to-day

MRS PURDY In th' pit?

MRS GASCOIGNE Yes—an's not goin' to get any accident pay—says as 'e worn't workin', he wor foolin' about

MRS PURDY T-t-t! Did iver you know! I tell you what, missis, it's a wonder they let us live on the face o' the earth at all—it's a wonder we don't have to fly up i' th' air like birds

JOE There'd be a squark i' th' sky then!

MRS PURDY But it is indeed It's somethink awful They've gave my mester a dirty job o' nights, at a guinea a week, an' he's worked fifty years for th' company, an' isn't but sixty-two now—said he wasn't equal to stall-workin', whereas he has to slave on th' roads an' comes whoam that tired he can't put's food in's mouth

JOE He's about like me

MRS PURDY Yis But it's no nice thing, a guinea a week

MRS GASCOIGNE Well, that's how they're servin' 'em a' round—widders' coals stopped—leadin' raised to four-an'-eight—an' ivry man niggled down to nothink

MRS PURDY I wish I'd got that Fraser strung up by th' heels—I'd ma'e his sides o' bacon 1owdy

MRS GASCOIGNE He's put a new manager to ivry pit, an' ivry one a nigger-driver

MRS PURDY Says he's got to economise—says the company's not a philanthropic concern—

MRS GASCOIGNE But ta'es twelve hundred a year for hissen

MRS PURDY A mangy bachelor wi' 'is iron-men

JOE But they wunna work

MRS PURDY They say how he did but coss an' swear about them
American Cutters I should like to see one set outer 'im—they'd
work hard enough rippin's guts out—even iron's got enough
sense for that (*She suddenly subsides*)

There is a pause

MRS GASCOIGNE How do you like living down Nethergreen?

MRS PURDY Well—we're very comfortable It's small, but it's
handy, an' sin' the mester's gone down t'a guinea——

MRS GASCOIGNE It'll do for you three

MRS PURDY Yes

Another pause

MRS GASCOIGNE The men are comin' out again, they say

MRS PURDY Isn't it summat sickenin'? Well, I've werritted an'
werritted till I'm soul-sick——

JOE It sends yer that thin an' threadbare, y'have ter stop some-
time

MRS PURDY There can be as much ache in a motherly body as in
bones an' gristle, I'm sure o' that

JOE Nay, I'm more than bones an' gristle

MRS PURDY That's true as the day

Another long pause

MRS GASCOIGNE An' how have yer all bin keepin'?

MRS PURDY Oh, very nicely—except our Bertha

MRS GASCOIGNE Is she poorly, then?

MRS PURDY That's what I com ter tell yer I niver knowed a word
on't till a Sat'day, nor niver noticed a thing Then she says to me,
as white as a sheet, "I've been sick every morning, Mother," an'
it com across me like a shot from a gun I sunk down i' that chair
an' couldna fetch a breath —An' me as prided myself I've often
laughed about it, an' said I was thankful my children had all
turned out so well, lads an' wenches as well, an' said it was
a'cause they was all got of a Sunday—their father was too drunk
a' Saturday, an' too tired o' wik-days An' it's a fact, they've all
turned out well, for I'd allers bin to chappil Well, I've said it
for a joke, but now it's turned on me I'd better ha' kep' my
tongue still

JOE It's not me, though, missis I wish it wor

MRS PURDY There's no occasions to ma'e gam of it neither, as far as I can see The youngest an' the last of em as I've got an a lass as I liked, for she's simple, but she's good-natured, an' him a married man Thinks I to myself, "I'd better go to's mother she'll ha'e more about 'er than s new wife—for she's a stuck-up piece o' goods as ever trod "

MRS GASCOIGNE Why, what d'yei mean?

MRS PURDY I mean what I say—an' there's no denyin it That girl—well, it's nigh on breakin' my heart, for I'm that short o' breath (*Sighs*) I'm sure!

MRS GASCOIGNE Why don't yer say what yer mean?

MRS PURDY I've said it, haven't I? There's my gal gone four month wi' childt to your Luther

MRS GASCOIGNE Nay, nay, nay, missis! You'll never ma'e me believe it

MRS PURDY Glad would I be if I nedna But I've gone through it all since Sat'day on I've wanted to break every bone in er body—an' I've said I should on'y be happy if I was scraightin' at 'er funeral—an' I've said I'd wring his neck for 'im But it doesn't alter it—there it is—an' there it will be An' I s'll be a grandmother where my heart heaves an' maun drag a wastiel baby through my old age An' it's neither a cryin' nor a laughin' matter, but it's a matter of a girl wi' child an' a man six week married

MRS GASCOIGNE But our Luther never went wi' your Bertha How d'you make it out?

MRS PURDY Yea, yea, missis—yea indeed

JOE Yi, Mother, he's bin out wi' 'er She wor pals wi' Liza Ann Varley, as went out wi' Jim Horrocks So Jim he passed Bertha onter our Luther Why, I've had many a glass wi' the four of 'em, I' "Th' Ram"

MRS GASCOIGNE I niver knowed nowt o' *this* afore

JOE Tha doesna know ivry think, Mother

MRS GASCOIGNE An' it's well I don't, methinks

JOE Tha doesna want, neither

MRS GASCOIGNE Well, I dunno what we're goin' to do missis He's a young married man

MRS PURDY An' she's a girl o' mine

MRS GASCOIGNE How old is she?

MRS PURDY She wor twenty-three last September

MRS GASCOIGNE Well then, I sh'd 'a thought she'd ha' known better

MRS PURDY An' what about him, missis, as goes and gets married
t'r another fine madam d'rectly after he's been wi' my long lass'

JOE But he never knowed owt about

MRS PURDY He'd seen th' blossom i' flower, if he hadna spotted the
fruit a-comin'

JOE Yi—but——

MRS GASCOIGNE Yi but what?

JOE Well—you dunna expect—ivry time yer cast yer bread on th'
wathers, as it'll come whoam to you like

MRS GASCOIGNE Well, I dunno what we're goin' to do

MRS PURDY I thought I'd better come to you, rather than——

JOE Ah, you non want it gettin' about—an' *she'd* best not know—
if it can be helped

MRS GASCOIGNE I can't see for why

MRS PURDY No indeed—a man as plays fast an' loose first wi' one
an' then goes an' marries another stuck-up piece

MRS GASCOIGNE An' a wench as goes sittin' i' "Th' Ram" wi' th'
fellers mun expect what she gets, missis

MRS PURDY 'Appen so, 'appen so An' th' man maun abide by what
he's gi'en

MRS GASCOIGNE I dunno *what* we're goin' to do'

JOE We'd best keep it as quiet as we can

MRS PURDY I thinks to mysen, "It'll non become *me* to go an'
jack up a married couple, for if *he's* at fault, it's her as 'ud ha'e
ter suffer" An' though she's haughty, I knowed her mother, as
nice a body as ever stept, an' treated scandylous by Jim Hethering-
ton An', thinks I, she's a horphan, if she's got money, an' nobbut
her husband i' th' world Thinks I to mysen it's no good visitin'
it on 'er head, if he's a villain For whatever th' men does, th'
women maun ma'e up for An' though I do consider as it's nowt
b'r a dirty trick o' his'n to ta'e a poor lass like my long thing, an'
go an' marry a woman wi' money——

MRS GASCOIGNE Woman 'wi' money, an' peace go wi' 'er, 'er an'
'er money' What she's got, she'll keep, you take my word for
it, missis

MRS PURDY Yes, an' she's right of it

JOE Nay, Mother, she's non close

MRS GASCOIGNE Isn't she?—oh, isn't she? An' what is she then? All she wanted was as much for her money as she could get An' when she fun as nob'dy was for sale but our Luther, she says, "Well, I'll take it"

JOE Nay, it worna like that—it wor him as wor that come-dav-go-day——

MRS PURDY God send Sunday

MRS GASCOIGNE An' what more canna man do, think yer, but ax a woman? When has *thee* ever done as much?

JOE No, I hanna, 'cos I've niver seen th' woman as I wanted to say "snap"—but he storm'd an' she——

MRS GASCOIGNE Storm'd! Thee storm but one fiftieth part to any lass thee likes, an' see if 'er's not all over thee afore tha's said six words Storm'd! 'Er wor that high an' mighty, 'er wanted summat bett'nor 'im

JOE Nay—I reckon he niver showed the spunk of a sprat-herring to 'er

MRS GASCOIGNE Did *thee* show any more? Hast iver done? Yet onybody 'ud think tha wor for marryin' 'er, th'ysen

JOE If I'd ha' *bin* for marryin' 'er, I d ha' gone wholesale, not ha' fudged and haffled

MRS GASCOIGNE But tha worna for marryin' neither ei nor nobody

JOE No, I worna

MRS GASCOIGNE No, tha worna

There is a long pause The mother turns half apologetically, half explanatorily, to MRS PURDY

It's like this 'ere, missis, if you'll not say nothink about it—sin' it's got to come out atween us He courted Minnie Hetherington when she wor at her uncle's, at th' "Bell o Brass", an' he wor nowt bu'r a lad o' twenty-two, an' she twenty-one An' he wor gone on 'er right enow Then she had that row wi' 'er uncle, for she wor iver overbearin' an' chancy Then our Luther says to me, "I s'll ax 'er to marry me, Mother," an' I says "Tha pleases thysen, but ter my thinkin' tha'rt a sight too young an' doesna know thy own mind" Howsoever, much notice 'e takes o' me

JOE He took a lot o' notice on thee, tha knows well enough

MRS GASCOIGNE An' for what shouldn't he? Hadn't I bin a good mother to 'im i' ivry shape an' form? Let *her* make him as good a wife as I made him a mother! Well—we'll see You'll see *him*

SCENE II

The same scene, two hours later The clothes are folded in little piles on the table and the sofa MRS HOLROYD is folding a thick flannel undervest or singlet which her husband wears in the pit and which has just dried on the fender

MRS HOLROYD (*to herself*) Now, thank goodness, they're all dried It's only nine o'clock, so he won't be in for another two hours, the nuisance (*She sits on the sofa, letting her arms hang down in dejection After a minute or two she jumps up, to begin rudely dropping the piles of washed clothes in the basket*) I don't care, I'm not going to let him have it all his way—no! (*She weeps a little, fiercely, drying her eyes on the edge of her white apron*) Why should I put up with it all?—He can do what he likes But I don't care, no, I don't—

She flings down the full clothes-basket, sits suddenly in the rocking-chair, and weeps There is the sound of coarse, bursting laughter, in vain subdued, and a man's deep guffaws Footsteps draw near Suddenly the door opens, and a little, plump, pretty woman of thirty, in a close-fitting dress and a giddy, filled bonnet of pink paper, stands perkily in the doorway MRS HOLROYD springs up, her small, sensitive nose is inflamed with weeping, her eyes are wet and flashing She fronts the other woman

CLARA (*with a pert smile and a jerk of the head*) Good evenin'!

MRS HOLROYD What do you want?

CLARA (*she has a Yorkshire accent*) Oh, we've not come beggin'—this is a visit

She stuffs her handkerchief in front of her mouth in a little snorting burst of laughter There is the sound of another woman behind going off into uncontrollable laughter, while a man guffaws

MRS HOLROYD (*after a moment of impotence—tragically*) What——!

CLARA (*faltering slightly, affecting a polite tone*) We thought we'd just call——

She stuffs her handkerchief in front of her explosive laughter

repent the day But they're not to be bidden An' so, missis, he did ax 'er, as 'e'd said 'e should But horty-torty an' no thank yer, she wasna for havin' him, but mun go an' be a nursery governess up i' Manchester Thinks I to myself, she's after a town johnny, a Bertie-Willie an' a yard o' cuffs But he kep' on writin' to 'er, now an' again—an' she answered—as if she wor standin' at top of a flight of steps

JOE An' 'appen on'y wanted fetchin' down

MRS GASCOIGNE Wl' a kick from behind, if I'd ha' had th' doin' o't So they go mornin' on He sees 'er once i' a blew moon If he goes ter Manchester, she condescends to see him for a couple of hours If she comes here, she ca's i' this house wl' a "how-do-you-do, Mrs Gascoigne", an' off again If they go f'r a walk

JOE He's whoam again at nine o'clock

MRS GASCOIGNE If they go for a walk it's "Thank you, I mustn't be very late Good night, Luther " I thought it ud niver come ter nothink Then 'er uncle dies an' leaves her a hundred pounds, which considerin' th' way she'd been with 'im, was more than I'd ha' gen her—an' she was a bit nicer She writes ter Luther ter come an' see 'er an' stop a couple o' days He ta'es her to the the-etter, an's for goin' i' th' pit at a shillin', when she says "It's my treat, Luther, and five shillin' seats apiece, if you please "

JOE An' he couldna luk at th' performance, for fear as the folks was luikin' at 'im

MRS GASCOIGNE An' after th' the-etter, it must be supper wl' a man i' a tail-coat an' silver forks, an' she pays "Yes," says I when he told me, "that's the tricks of servants, showin' off afore decent folk "

JOE She could do what she liked, couldn't she?

MRS GASCOIGNE Well, an' after that, he didna write, 'cept to say thank yer For it put 'im in a horkard position That wor four years ago, an' she's nobbut seen him three times sin' that If she could but ha' snapped up somebody else, it 'ud bin good-bye to Luther—

JOE As tha told him many a time

MRS GASCOIGNE As I told him many a time, for am I to sit an' see my own lad bitted an' bobbed, tasted an' spit out by a madam i' service? Then all of a suddin, three months back, come a letter "Dear Luther, I have been thinking it over, an' have come to the

opinion that we'd better get married now if we are ever goin' to. We've been dallyin' on all these years, and we seem to get no further. So we'd better make the plunge if ever we're going to. Of course you will say exactly what you think. Don't agree to anything unless you want to. I only want to say that I think if we're ever going to be married, we'd better do it without waitin' any longer." Well, missis, he got that letter when he com' whoam fra work. I seed him porin' an' pooin', but I says nowt. Then he ate some o's dinner, and went out. When he com' in, it wor about haef past ten, an' 'e wor white as a sheet. He gen me that letter, an' says "What's think o' that, Mother?" Well, you could ha' knocked me down wi' a feather when I'd read it. I says "I think it's tidy cheek, my lad." He took it back an' puts 's pocket, an' after a bit, 'e says "What should ter say, Mother?" "Tha says what's a mind, my lad," I says. So he begins unlacin' 's boots. Sudden he stops, an' wi' boot-tags rattlin' goes rum-magin' for th' pen an' ink. "What ait goin' to say?" I says. "I'm goin' ter say, 'er can do as 'er's a mind. If 'ei wants ter be married, 'er can, an' if 'er doesna, 'ei nedna." So I thinks we could leave it at that. He sits him down, an' doesna write more nor a side an' a haef. I thinks "That's done it, it'll be an end between them two now." He niver gen th' letter to me to read.

JOE He did to me. He says "I'm ready an' willin' to do what you want, whenever yer want. I'm earnin' about thirty-five bob a week, an' haven't got any money because my mother g'ies me what I ax for ter spend. But I can have what I ask for to set up house with. Your loving—Luther." He says to me "Dost think it's a'right?" I says "I s'd think so, 'er maun ma'e what 'er likes out on't."

MRS GASCOIGNE On th' Monday after, she wor here livin' at 'ei. A'nt's an' th' notice was in at th' registrar. I says "What money dost want?" He says "Thee buy what tha thinks we s'll want." So he tells Minnie, an' she says "Not bi-out I'm thee!" Well, we goes ter Nottingham, an' she will ha'e nowt b'r old-fashioned stuff. I says "That's niver my mind, Minnie." She says "Well, I like it, an' yo'll see it'll look nice. I'll pay for it." Which to be sure I never let her. For she'd had a mester as made a fool of her tellin' her this an' that, what wor good taste, what wor bad.

JOE An' it *does* look nice, Mother, their house.

MRS GASCOIGNE We'll see how it looks i' ten years' time, my lad,
wi' th' racket an' tacket o' children For it's not serviceable,
missis

MRS PURDY (*who has been a sympathetic and exclamative listener*)
Then it's no good

MRS GASCOIGNE An' that's how they got married

JOE An' he went about wi's tail atween his legs, scared outer's
life

MRS GASCOIGNE For I said no more If he axed me owt, I did it,
if he wanted owt, I got it But it wasn't for me to go interferin'
where I wasn't wanted

JOE If ever I get married, Mother, I s'll go i' lodgin's six month
aforehand

MRS GASCOIGNE Tha'd better—ter get thysen a bit case-hardened

JOE Y! But I'm goin' t'r Australia

MRS GASCOIGNE I come withee, then

JOE Tha doesna

MRS GASCOIGNE I dunna fret—tha'lt non go

MRS PURDY Well, it was what I should call a bit off-hand, I must
say

MRS GASCOIGNE You can see now how he got married, an' who's
to blame

JOE Nay, yo' canna ma'e 'er to blame for Bertha Liza Ann Varley's
ter blame for th' lass goin' out o' nights

MRS PURDY An' there I thought they wor both i' Varley's—not
gallivantin'

JOE They often was An' Jim Horrocks is ter blame fer couplin'
'er onter our Luther, an' him an' her's ter blame for the rest I
dunno how you can lay it on Minnie You might as well lay it
on 'er if th' childt wor mine

MRS GASCOIGNE (*sharply*) Tha'd ha'e more sense!

JOE I'd try

MRS GASCOIGNE But now she's played fast an' loose wi' him—
twice I *know* he axed 'er to ha'e him—now she's asked for what
she's got She's put her puddin' in her mouth, an' if she's burnt
herself, serve her right

MRS PURDY Well, I didn't want to go to court I thought, his
mother'll be th' best one to go to—

MRS GASCOIGNE No—you mun go to him hisself—go an' tell him

1' front of her—an' if she wants anythink, she mun ma'e arrangements herself

JOE What was you thinkin' of, Missis Purdy?

MRS PURDY Well, I was thinkin', she's a poor lass—an' I didn't want 'er to go to court, for they ax such questions—an' I thought it was such a *thing*, him six wiks married—though to be sure I'd no notions of how it was—I thought, we might happen say, it was one o' them electricians as was along when they laid th' wires under th' road down to Batsford—and——

JOE And arrange for a lump sum, like?

MRS PURDY Yes—we're poor, an' she's poor—an' if she had a bit o' money of 'er own—for we should niver touch it—it might be a inducement to some other young feller—for, poor long thing she's that simple——

MRS GASCOIGNE Well, ter my knowledge them as has had a childt seems to get off 1' marriage better nor many as hasn't I'm sure, there's a lot o' men likes it, if they think a woman s had a baby by another man

MRS PURDY That's nothing to trust by, missis you'll say so yourself

JOE An' about how much do you want? Thirty pounds?

MRS PURDY We want what's fair I got it fra Emma Stapleton, they had forty wi' their Lucy

JOE Forty pound?

MRS PURDY Yes

MRS GASCOIGNE Well, then, let *her* find it She's paid for nothing but the wedding She's got money enough, if he's none Let *her* find it She made the bargain, she maun stick by it It was her dip 1' th' bran-tub—if there's a mouse nips hold of her finger, she maun suck it better, for nobody axed her to dip

MRS PURDY You think I'd better go to him? Eh, missis it's a nasty business But right's right

MRS GASCOIGNE Right is right, Mrs Purdy And you go tell him a-front of her—that's the best thing you can do Then iverything's straight

MRS PURDY But for her he might ha' married our Bertha

MRS GASCOIGNE To be sure, to be sure

MRS PURDY What right had she to snatch when it pleased her?

MRS GASCOIGNE That's what I say If th' woman ca's for th' piper,
th' woman maun pay th tune

MRS PURDY Not but what——

JOE It's a nasty business

MRS GASCOIGNE Nasty or not, it's hers now, not mine He's *her*
husband "My son's my son till he takes him a wife," an' no
longer Now let her answer for it

MRS PURDY An' you think I'd better go when they're both in?

MRS GASCOIGNE I should go to-night, atween six an' seven, that's
what I should do

JOE I never should If I was you, I'd settle it wi'out Minnie's
knowin'—it's bad enough

MRS GASCOIGNE What's bad enough?

JOE Why, that

MRS GASCOIGNE What?

JOE Him an' 'er—it's bad enough as it is

MRS GASCOIGNE (*with great bitterness*) Then let it be a bit worse,
let it be a bit worse Let her have it, then, it'll do her good Who
is she, to trample eggs that another hen would sit warm? No—
Mrs Purdy, *give* it her It'll take her down a peg or two, and, my
sirs, she wants it, my sirs, she needs it!

JOE (*muttering*) A fat lot o' good it'll do

MRS GASCOIGNE What has thee ter say, I should like to know?
Fed an' clothed an' coddled, tha art, an' not a thing tha lacks
But wait till I'm gone, my lad, tha'll know what I've done for
thee, then, tha will

JOE For a' that, it's no good 'er knowin'

MRS GASCOIGNE Isna it?—isna it? If it's not good for 'er, it's good
for 'im

JOE I dunna believe it

MRS GASCOIGNE Who asked *thee* to believe it? Tha's showed thy-
sen a wise man *this* day, hasn't ter? Wheer should ter be ter-
day but for me? Wheer should ter iver ha' bin? An' then *tha*
sits up for to talk It ud look better o' thee not to spit i' th' hand
as holds thy bread an' butter

JOE Neither do I

MRS GASCOIGNE Doesn't ter! Tha has a bit too much chelp an'
chunter It doesna go well, my lad Tha wor blortin' an' blether-
in' down at th' office a bit sin', an' a mighty fool tha made o' thy-

sen How should thee like to go home wi thv tale o' to-day to Minnie, might I ax thee?

JOE If she didna like it, she could lump it

MRS GASCOIGNE It 'ud be thee as 'ud lump, my lad But what does thee know about it? 'Er's up th' guts out on thee like a tiger, an stan' grinnin' at thee when tha shrivelled up 'cause tha d no inside left

MRS PURDY She looks it, I must admit—every bit of it

JOE For a' that, it's no good her knowing

MRS GASCOIGNE Well, I say it *is*—an' thee tha sniftly little know-all, as blorts at one minute like a suckin calf an' th' next blethers like a hass, dunna thee come layin' th' law down to me, for I know better No, Mrs Purdy, it's no good comin' to me You've a right to some compensation, an' that lass o' yours has but let them as cooked the goose eat it, that's all Let him arrange it hisself—an' if he does nothink, put him i' court, that's all

MRS PURDY He's not goin' scot-free, you may back your life o' that

MRS GASCOIGNE You go down to-night atween six an' seven an' let 'em have it straight You know where they live?

MRS PURDY I' Simson Street?

MRS GASCOIGNE About four houses up—next Holbrooks

MRS PURDY (*rising*) Yes

JOE An' it'll do no good Gie me th' money, Mother, I'll pay it

MRS GASCOIGNE Tha wunna!

JOE I've a right to th' money—I've addled it

MRS GASCOIGNE A' right—an' I've saved it for thee But tha has none on't till tha knocks me down an' ta'es it out o' my pocket

MRS PURDY No—let them pay themselves It's not thy childt, is it?

JOE It isna—but the money is

MRS GASCOIGNE We'll see

MRS PURDY Well, I mun get back Thank yer, missis

MRS GASCOIGNE And thank you! I'll come down to-morrow—at dark hour

MRS PURDY Thank yer—I hope yer a'm'll soon be better

JOE Thank yer

MRS GASCOIGNE I'll come down to-morrow You'll go to-night—atween six an' seven?

MRS PURDY Yes—if it mun be done, it mun He took his own way, she took hers, now I m'un take mine Well, good afternoon I mun see about th' mester's dinner

JOE And you haven't said nothink to nobody?

MRS PURDY I haven't—I shouldn't be flig, should I?

JOE No—I should keep it quiet as long's you can

MRS GASCOIGNE There's no need for a' th' world to-know—but them as is concerned maun abide by it

MRS PURDY Well, good afternoon

MRS GASCOIGNE Good afternoon

JOE Good afternoon

Exit MRS PURDY

Well, that's a winder!

MRS GASCOIGNE Serve her right, for tip-callin' wi'm all those years

JOE She niver ought to know

MRS GASCOIGNE I—I could fetch thee a wipe ower th' face, I could!

He sulks She is in a rage

SCENE II

The kitchen of LUTHER GASCOIGNE's new home

It is pretty—in "cottage" style, rush-bottomed chairs, black oak-bureau, brass candlesticks, delit, etc Green cushions in chairs Towards five o'clock Firelight It is growing dark MINNIE GASCOIGNE is busy about the fire a tall, good-looking young woman, in a shirt-blouse and dark skirt, and apron She lifts lids of saucepans, etc, hovers impatiently, looks at clock, begins to trim lamp

MINNIE I wish he'd come If I didn't want him, he'd be here half-an-hour since But just because I've got a pudding that wants eating on the tick •! He—he's never up to the cratch, he never is As if the day wasn't long enough!

Sound of footsteps She seizes a saucepan, and is rushing towards the door The latch has clacked LUTHER appears in the doorway, in his pit-dirt—a collier of medium height, with

*fair moustache He has a red scart knotted round his throat,
and a cap with a Union medal* The two almost collide*

LUTHER My word, you're on the hop!

MINNIE (*disappearing into scullery*) You nearly made me drop
the saucepan Why are you so late?

LUTHER I'm non late, am I?

MINNIE You're twenty minutes later than yesterday

LUTHER Oh ah, I stopped finishing a stint an' com up wi' a'most
th' last batch

*He takes a tin bottle and a dirty calico snap-bag out of his
pocket, puts them on the bureau, goes into the scullery*

MINNIE'S VOICE No!

*She comes hurrying out with the saucepan In a moment,
LUTHER follows He has taken off his coat and cap, his heavy
trousers are belted round his hips, his arms are bare to above
the elbow, because the pit-singlet of thick flannel is almost
sleeveless*

LUTHER Tha art throng!

MINNIE (*at the fire, flushed*) Yes, and everythings ready, and will
be spoiled

LUTHER Then we'd better eat it afore I wash me

MINNIE No—no—it's not nice——

LUTHER Just as ter's a mind—but there's scarce a collier in a
thousand washes hissen afore he has his dinner We niver did
a-whoam

MINNIE But it doesn't look nice

LUTHER Eh, wench, tha'lt soon get used ter th' looks on me A
bit o' dirt's like a veil on my face—I shine through th' andsomer
What hast got? (*He peers over her range*)

MINNIE (*waving a fork*) You're not to look

LUTHER It smells good

MINNIE Are you going to have your dinner like that?

LUTHER Ay, lass—just for once

*He spreads a newspaper in one of the green-cushioned arm-
chairs and sits down She disappears into the scullery with a
saucepan He takes off his great pit-boots She sets a soup-
tureen on the table, and lights the lamp He watches her face
in the glow*

Tha'rt non bad-luikin' when ter's a mind

MINNIE When have I a mind?

LUTHER Tha's allers a mind—but when ter lights th' lamp tha'rt
i' luck's way

MINNIE Come on, then

He drags his chair to the table

LUTHER I s'll ha'e ter ha'e a newspaper afront on me, or thy
cloth'll be a blackymoor (*Begins disarranging the pots*)

MINNIE Oh, you *are* a nuisance! (*Jumps up*)

LUTHER I can put 'em a' back again

MINNIE I know your puttings back

LUTHER Tha couldna get married by thysen, could ter?—so tha'lt
ha'e ter ma'e th' best on me

MINNIE But you're such a bother—never here at the right time—
never doing the right thing——

LUTHER An' my mouth's ter wide an' my head's ter narrow Shalt
iver ha' come ter th' end of my faults an' failin's?

MINNIE (*giving him soup*) I wish I could

LUTHER An' now tha'lt snap mu head off 'cos I slobber, shanna
tha?

MINNIE Then don't slobber

LUTHER I'll try my luck What hast bin doin' a' day?

MINNIE Working

LUTHER Has our Joe bin in?

MINNIE No I rather thought he might, but he hasn't

LUTHER You've not been up home?

MINNIE To your mother's? No, what should I go there for?

LUTHER Eh, I dunno what ter should go for—I thought tha 'appen
might

MINNIE But what for?

LUTHER Nay—I niver thowt nowt about what for

MINNIE Then why did you ask me?

LUTHER I dunno (*A pause*)

MINNIE Your mother can come here, can't she?

LUTHER Ay, she can come Tha'll be goin' up wi' me to-night—
I want ter go an' see about our Joe

MINNIE What about him?

LUTHER How he went on about's club money Shall ter come
wi' me?

MINNIE I wanted to do my curtains

LUTHER But tha's got a' day to do them in

MINNIE But I want to do them to-night—I feel like it

LUTHER A' right—I shanna be long, at any rate

(*A pause*)

What dost keep lookin' at?

MINNIE How?

LUTHER Tha keeps thy eye on me rarely

MINNIE (*laughing*) It's your mouth—it looks so red and bright,
in your black face

LUTHER Does it look nasty to thee?

MINNIE No—no-o

LUTHER (*pushing his moustache, laughing*) It ma'es you look like
a nigger, i' your pit-dirt—th' whites o' your eyes!

MINNIE Just

*She gets up to take his plate, goes and stands beside him. He
lifts his face to her*

I want to see if I can see you, you look so different

LUTHER Tha can see me well enough. Why dost want to?

MINNIE It's almost like having a stranger

LUTHER Would ter rather?

MINNIE What?

LUTHER Ha'e a stranger?

MINNIE What for?

LUTHER Hao—I dunno

MINNIE (*touching his hair*) You look rather nice—an' your hair's
so dirty

LUTHER Gi'e me a kiss

MINNIE But where? You're all grime

LUTHER I'm sure I've licked my mouth clean

MINNIE (*stooping suddenly, and kissing him*) You don't look
nearly such a tame rabbit, in your pit-dirt

LUTHER (*catching her in his arms*) Dunna I' (*Kisses her*) What
colour is my eyes?

MINNIE Bluey-grey

LUTHER An' thine's grey an' black

MINNIE Mind! (*She looks at her blouse when he releases her*)

LUTHER (*timid*) Have I blacked it?

MINNIE A bit

She goes to the scullery, returns with another dish

—the other woman shrieks again, beginning high, and running down the scale

MRS HOLROYD What do you mean?—What do you want here?

CLARA (*she bites her lip*) We don't want anything, thanks We've just called (*She begins to laugh again—so does the other*) Well, I don't think much of the manners in this part of the country (*She takes a few hesitating steps into the kitchen*)

MRS HOLROYD (*trying to shut the door upon her*) No, you are not coming in

CLARA (*preventing her closing the door*) Dear me, what a to-do! (*She struggles with the door The other woman comes up to help, a man is seen in the background*)

LAURA My word, aren't we good enough to come in?

MRS HOLROYD, *finding herself confronted by what seems to her excitement a crowd, releases the door and draws back a little—almost in tears of anger*

MRS HOLROYD You have no business here What do you want?

CLARA (*putting her bonnet straight and entering in brisk defiance*) I tell you we've only come to see you (*She looks round the kitchen, then makes a gesture toward the arm-chair*) Can I sit here? (*She plumps herself down*) Rest for the weary

A woman and a man have followed her into the room LAURA is highly coloured, stout, some forty years old, wears a blue paper bonnet, and looks like the landlady of a public-house Both she and CLARA wear much jewellery LAURA is well dressed in a blue cloth dress HOLROYD is a big blond man His cap is pushed back, and he looks rather tipsy and lawless He has a heavy blond moustache His jacket and trousers are black, his vest grey, and he wears a turn-down collar with dark bow

LAURA (*sitting down in a chair on right, her hand on her bosom, panting*) I've laughed till I feel fair bad

CLARA 'Aven't you got a drop of nothink to offer us, mester? Come, you are slow I should 'ave thought a gentleman like you would have been out with the glasses afore we could have got breaths to ask you

HOLROYD (*clumsily*) I dunna believe there's owt in th' 'ouse but a bottle of stout

CLARA (*putting her hand on her stomach*) It feels as if th' kettle's going to boil over

LUTHER They talkin' about comin' out again

MINNIE (*returning*) Good laws'—they've no need

LUTHER They are, though

MINNIE It's a holiday they want

LUTHER Nay, it isna They want th' proper scale here, just as they ha'e it ivrywhere else

MINNIE But if the seams are thin, and the company can't afford

LUTHER They can afford a' this gret new electric plant, they can afford to build new houses for managers, an' ter give blo— ter give Frazer twelve hundred a year

MINNIE If they want a good manager to make the pits pay, they have to give him a good salary

LUTHER So's he can clip down our wages

MINNIE Why, what are yours clipped down?

LUTHER Mine isn't, but there's plenty as is

MINNIE And will this strike make a butty of you?

LUTHER You don't strike to get made a butty on

MINNIE Then how *do* you do it? You're thirty-one

LUTHER An' there's many as owd as me as is day-men yet

MINNIE But there's more that aren't, that are butties

LUTHER Ay, they've had luck

MINNIE Luck! You mean they've had some *go* in them

LUTHER Why, what can I do more than I am doin'?

MINNIE It isn't what you do, it's how you do it Sluther through any job, get to th' end of it, no matter how That's you

LUTHER I hole a stunt as well as any man

MINNIE Then I back it takes you twice as long

LUTHER Nay, nor that neither

MINNIE I know you're not much of a workman—I've heard it from other butties, that you never put your heart into anything

LUTHER Who hast heard it fra?

MINNIE From those that know And I could ha' told it *them*, for I know you You'll be a day-man at seven shillings a day till the end of your life—and you'll be satisfied, so long as you can shilly-shally through That's what your mother did for you—mardin' you up till you were all mard-soft

LUTHER Tha's got a lot ter say a' of a suddin Thee shut thy mouth

MINNIE You've been diagged round at your mother's apron-strings, all the lot of you, till there isn't half a man among you

LUTHER Tha seems fond enough of our Joe

MINNIE He is th' best in the bunch

LUTHER Tha should ha' married him, then

MINNIE I shouldn't have had to ask *him*, if he was ready

LUTHER I'd axed thee twice afore—tha knowed tha could ha'e it
when ter wanted

MINNIE Axed me! It was like asking me to pull out a tooth for
you

LUTHER Y1, an' it felt like it

MINNIE What?

LUTHER Axin' thee to marry me I'm blessed if it didna feel like
axin' the doctor to pull ten teeth out of a stroke

MINNIE And then you expect me to have you!

LUTHER Well, tha *has* done, whether or not

MINNIE I—yes, I had to fetch you, like a mother fetches a kid
from school A pretty sight you looked Didn't your mother give
you a ha'penny to spend, to get you to go?

LUTHER No, she spent it for me

MINNIE She would! She wouldn't even let you spend your own
ha'penny You'd have lost it or let somebody take it from
you

LUTHER Y1 Thee

MINNIE Me!—me take anything from you! Why, you've got
nothing worth having

LUTHER I dunno—tha seems ter think so sometimes

MINNIE Oh! Shilly-shally and crawl, that's all you can do You
ought to have stopped with your mother

LUTHER I should ha' done, if tha hadna hawked me out

MINNIE You aren't *fit* for a woman to have married, you're not

LUTHER Then why did thee marry me? It wor thy doin's

MINNIE Because I could get nobody better

LUTHER I'm more class than I thought for, then

MINNIE Are you! Are you!

JOE'S voice is heard

JOE I'm comin' in, you two, so stop snaggin' an' snarlin'

LUTHER Come in, 'er'll 'appen turn 'er tap on thee

JOE enters

JOE Are you eatin' yet?

LUTHER Ay—it ta'es 'er that long ter tell my sins Tha's just come

right for puddin' Get thee a plate outer t'cupboard—an' a spoon outer t'basket

JOE (*at the cupboard*) You've got ivrythink tip-top What should ter do if I broke thee a plate, Minnie?

MINNIE I should break another over your head

He deliberately drops and smashes a plate She flushes crimson

LUTHER Well, I'm glad it worna me

JOE I'm that clumsy wi' my left 'and, Minnie! Why doesna ter break another ower my head?

LUTHER (*rising and putting pudding on a plate*) Here, ta'e this an' sit thee down

His brother seats himself

Hold thy knees straight, an' for God's sake dunna thee break this Can ter manage?

JOE I reckon so If I canna, Minnie'll feed me wi' a spoon Shonna ter?

MINNIE Why did you break my plate?

JOE Nay, I didna break it—it wor the floor

MINNIE You did it on purpose

JOE How could I? I didn't say ter th' floor "Break thou this plate, O floor!"

MINNIE You have no right

JOE (*addressing the floor*) Tha'd no right to break that plate—dost hear? I'd a good mind ter drop a bit o' puddin' on thy face

He balances the spoon, the plate slides down from his knee, smash into the fender

MINNIE (*screams*) It's my best service! (*Begins to sob*)

LUTHER Nay, our Joe!

JOE 'Er's no occasions ter scaight I bought th' service an' I can get th' plates matched What's her grizzlin' about?

MINNIE I shan't ask you to get them matched

JOE Dunna thee, an' then tha runs no risk o' bein' denied

MINNIE What have you come here like this for?

JOE I haena come here like this I come ter tell yer our Harriet says, would yer mind goin' an' tellin' 'er what she can do with that childt's coat, as she's made a' wrong If you'd looked slippy, I'd ha' ta'en yer ter th' Cinematograph after But, dearly-beloved

brethren, let us weep; these our dear departed dinner-plates . . .
Come, Minnie, drop a tear as you pass by.

LUTHER (to MINNIE): Tha needna fret, Minnie, they can easy be matched again.

MINNIE: You're just pleased to see him make a fool of me, aren't you?

LUTHER: He's non made a fool o' thee—tha's made a fool o' thyself, scraightin' an' carryin' on.

JOE: It's a fact, Minnie. Nay, let me kiss thee better.

She has risen, with shut face.

He approaches with outstretched left arm. She swings round, fetches him a blow over his upper right arm. He bites his lip with pain.

LUTHER (rising): Has it hurt thee, lad? Tha shouldna fool wi' her.

MINNIE watches the two brothers with tears of mortification in her eyes. Then she throws off her apron, pins on her hat, puts on her coat, and is marching out of the house.

LUTHER: Are you going to Harriet's?

JOE: I'll come and fetch you in time for th' Cinematograph.

The door is heard to bang.

JOE (picking up broken fragments of plates): That's done it.

LUTHER: It's bad luck—ne'er mind. How art goin' on?

JOE: Oh, alright.

LUTHER: What about thy club money?

JOE: They wunna gi'e't me. But, I say, sorry—tha'rt for it.

LUTHER: Ay—I dunno what 'er married me for, f'r it's nowt but fault she finds wi' me, from th' minnit I come i' th' house to th' minnit I leave it.

JOE: Dost wish tha'd niver done it?—niver got married?

LUTHER (sulky): I dunno—sometimes.

JOE (with tragic emphasis): Then it's the blasted devil!

LUTHER: I dunno—I'm married to 'er, an' she's married to me, so she can pick holes i' me as much as she likes——

JOE: As a rule, she's nice enough wi' me.

LUTHER: She's nice wi' ivrybody but me.

JOE: An' dost ter care?

LUTHER: Ay—I do.

JOE: Why doesn't ter go out an' leave her?

LUTHER: I dunno.

JOE By the Lord, she'd cop it if I had 'er

Pause

LUTHER I wor comin' up to-night

JOE I thought tha would be But there's Mrs Purdy comin' ter see thee

LUTHER There's who?

JOE Mrs Purdy Didna ter ha'e a bit of a go wi' their Bertha, just afore Minnie wrote thee?

LUTHER Ay Why?

JOE 'Er mother says she's wi' childt by thee She come up ter my mother this afternoon, an' said she wor comin' here to-night

LUTHER Says what?

JOE Says as their Bertha's goin' ter ha'e a child, an' 'er lays it on ter thee

LUTHER Oh, my good God!

JOE Isna it right?

LUTHER It's right if 'er says so

JOE Then it's the blasted devil! (*A pause*) So I come on here ter see if I could get Minnie to go up to our Harriet

LUTHER Oh, my good God!

JOE I thought, if we could keep it from 'er, we might settle summat, an' 'er niver know

LUTHER (*slowly*) My God alive!

JOE She said she'd hush it up, an' lay it ont'r a electrician as laid th' cable, an' is gone goodness knows where—make an arrangement, for forty pound

LUTHER (*thoughtfully*) I wish I wor struck dead

JOE Well, tha arena', an' so tha'd better think about it My mother said as Minnie ought to know, but I say diff'rent, an' if Mrs Purdy doesna tell her, nobody need

LUTHER I wish I wor struck dead I wish a ton o' rock 'ud fa' on me to-morrer

JOE It wunna for wishin'

LUTHER My good God!

JOE An' so—I'll get thee forty quid, an' lend it thee When Mrs Purdy comes, tell her she shall ha'e twenty quid this day week, an' twenty quid a year from now, if thy name's niver been mentioned I believe 'er's a clat-fart

LUTHER Me a childt by Bertha Purdy ' But—but what's that for—
now there's Minnie'

JOE I dunno what it's for, but thee! it is, as I'm tellin' thee I'll
stop for another haef an hour, an' if ei doesna come than mun
see to 'er by thy sen

LUTHER 'Er'll be back afore haef an hour's up Tha mun go an'
stop 'er I—I niver meant—— Look here, our Joe, I—if I—
if she—if she—— My God, what have I done now'

JOE We can stop her from knowin'

LUTHER (*looking round*) She'll be comin' back any minnit Nav I
niver meant t'r ha' Joe

JOE What?

LUTHER She—she——

JOE 'Er niver ned know

LUTHER Ah, but though

JOE What?

LUTHER I—I—I've *done* it

JOE Well, it might ha' happened t'i anybody

LUTHER But when 'er knows—an' it's *me* as has done it

JOE It wouldn't ha' mattered o' anyhow, if it had bin sumb'dy else
But tha knows what ter's got ter say Aiena' ter goin' ter wesh
thee? Go an' get th' panchion

LUTHER (*rising*) 'Er'll be comin' in any minnit

JOE Get thee weshed, man

LUTHER (*fetching a bucket and lading can from the scullery, and
emptying water from the boiler*) Go an' ta'e 'ei somewhere,
while Mrs Purdy goes, shall ter?

JOE D'rectly Tha heered what I telled thee?

There is a noise of splashing in the scullery. Then a knock

JOE goes to the door. He is heard saying 'Come in'

Enter MRS PURDY

MRS PURDY I hope I've not come a-mealtimes

JOE No, they've finished Minnie's gone up t'i our Harriet's

MRS PURDY Thank the Lord for small mercies—for I didn't fancv
sittin' an' tellin' her about our Bertha

JOE We dunna want 'er ter know Sit thee down

MRS PURDY I'm of that mind, mester, I am As I said what's th'
good o' jackin' up a young married couple? For it won't unmarry

'em nor ma c things ight An' yet, my long lass oughtner ter
bear a' th' brunt

JOE Well, an' 'er isna goin' to

MRS PURDY Is that Mester weshin'?

JOE Ah

MRS PURDY 'As ter tow'd him?

JOE Ah

MRS PURDY Well, it's none o' my wishin's, I'm sure o' that Eh,
dear, you've bin breakin' th' crockery a'ready!

JOE Yes, that's me, bein' wallit

MRS PURDY T-t-t! So this is 'ow she fancied it?

JOE Ah, an' it non luiks bad, does it?

MRS PURDY Very natty Very nice an' natty

JOE (*taking up the lamp*) Come an' look at th' parlour

JOE and MRS PURDY *exit R*

MRS PURDY'S VOICE Yis—yis—it's nice an' plain But a bit o' red
plush is 'andsomer, to my mind It's th'old-fashioned style, like!
My word, but them three ornyments is gaudy-lookin'

JOE An' they reckon they're worth five pound 'Er mester gen
'em 'er

MRS PURDY I'd rather had th' money

JOE Ah, me an' a'

*During this time, LUTHER has come hurrying out of the
scullery into the kitchen, rubbing his face with a big roller-
towel He is naked to the waist He kneels with his knees on
the fender, sitting on his heels, rubbing himself His back is
not washed He rubs his hair dry*

Enter JOE, with the lamp, followed by MRS PURDY

MRS PURDY It's uncommon, very uncommon, Mester Gaskin—and
looks well, too, for them as likes it But it hardly goes wi' my
fancy, somehow, startin' wi' second-hand, owd-fashioned stuff
You dunno who's sotten themselves on these 'ere chairs, now,
do you?

LUTHER It ma'es no diff'rence to me who's sot on 'em an' who
'asna

MRS PURDY No—you get used to'm

LUTHER (*to JOE*) Shall thee go up t'r our Harriet's?

JOE If ter's a mind (*Takes up his cap To MRS PURDY*) An' you
two can settle as best you can

MRS PURDY Yes—yes I m not one for baulkin mysen an cuttin' off my nose ter spite my face

LUTHER *has finished wiping himself. He takes a shutting shirt from the bureau, and struggles into it then goes into the scullery*

JOE An' you sure you ll keep it quiet, missis'?

MRS PURDY Am I goin' bletherin' up street an' down street, think yei'?

JOE An' dunna tell your Bob

MRS PURDY I've more sense There's not a word 'e ears a whoam as is of any count, for out it 'ud leak when he wor canned Yes, my guyny—we know what our mester is

Re-enter LUTHER, in shirt and black trousers. He drops his pit-trousers and singlet beside the hearth

MRS PURDY *bends down and opens his pit-trousers*

MRS PURDY Nay, if ter drops 'em of a heap, thev niver goin' ter get dry an' cosv Tha sweats o' th' hips as my lads did

LUTHER Well go thy ways, Joe

JOE Ay—well—good luck An' good night, Mrs Purdy

MRS PURDY Good night

Exit JOE

There are several moments of silence

LUTHER *puts the broken pots on the table*

MRS PURDY It's sad work, Mester Gaskin, f'r a' on us

LUTHER Ay

MRS PURDY I left that long lass o' mine fair gaunt fair chalked of a line, I did, poor thing Not bu' what 'er should a 'ad more sense

LUTHER Ah'

MRS PURDY But it's no use throwin' good words after bad deeds Not but what it's a nasty thing for yer t'r 'a done, it is—an' yei can scarce look your missis i' th' face again, I should think (*Pause*) But I says t'r our Bertha, "It's his'n, an' he mun pay i'" Eh, but how 'er did but scraight an' cry It fau turned me ower "Dunna go to 'm, Mother," 'er says, "dunna go to 'm for to tell him i'" "Yi," I says, "right's right—tha doesna get off w i' nowt, nor shall 'e neither 'E wor but a scamp to do such a thing," I says, yes, I did For you was older nor 'er Not but what she was

day go-day sort, as 'ud gi'e th' clothes off 'er back an' niver know 'er wor nek'd—a gra't soft 'ooney as she is, an' serves 'er right for bein' such a gaby Y1, an' I believe 'er wor fond on thee—if a wench can be fond of a married man For one blessing, 'er doesna know what 'er wor an' what 'er worn't For they mau talk o' bein' i' love—but you non in love wi' onybody, wi'out they's a chance o' their marryin' you—howiver much you may like 'em An' I'm thinkin', th' childt'll set 'er up again when it comes, for 'ei's gone that wezzel-brained an' doited, I'm sure! An' it's a mort o' trouble for me, mester, a sight o' trouble it is Not as I s'll be hard on 'er She knowed I wor comin' 'ere to-night, an's not spoke a word for hours I left 'er sittun' on th' sofey hangin' 'er 'ead But it's a weary business, mester, an' nowt ter be proud on I s'd think tha wishes tha'd niver clapt eyes on our Bertha

LUTHER (*thinking hard*) I dunna—I dunna An' I dunna wish as I'd niver seen 'er, no, I dunna 'Er liked me, an' I liked 'er
MRS PURDY An' 'appen, but for this 'ere marriage o' thine, tha'd 'a married 'er

LUTHER Ah, I should Fr 'er liked me, an' 'er worna neither nice nor near, nor owt else, an' 'er'd bin fond o' me

MRS PURDY 'Er would, an' it's a thousand pities But what's done's done

LUTHER Ah, I know that

MRS PURDY An' as for yer missis—

LUTHER 'Er mun do as 'er likes

MRS PURDY But tha'rt not for tellin' 'er?

LUTHER 'Er—'er'll know some time or other

MRS PURDY Nay, nay, 'er nedna You married now, lad, an' you canna please yoursen

LUTHER It's a fact

MRS PURDY An' Lizzy Stapleton, she had forty pound wi' 'er lad, an' it's not as if you hadn't got money An' to be sure, we've none

LUTHER No, an' I've none

MRS PURDY Yes, you've some atween you—an'—well

LUTHER I can get some

MRS PURDY Then what do you say?

LUTHER I say as Bertha's welcome t'r any forty pounds, if I'd got

it For—for—missis, she wor better to me than iver my wife's bin

MRS PURDY (*frightened by his rage*) Niver, lad!

LUTHER She wor—ah but though she wor She thought a lot on me

MRS PURDY An' so I'm sure your missis does She naggles thy heart out, maybe But that's just the wrigglin' a place out for hersen

She'll settle down comfortable, lad,

LUTHER (*bitterly*) Will she!

MRS PURDY Yi—yi An' tha's done 'er a crewel wrong my lad An' tha's done my gel one as well For, though she was old enough to know better, yet she's good-hearted and trusting, an 'ud gi'e 'er shoes off 'er feet An' tha's landed 'er, tha knows For it's not th' bad women as 'as bastards nowadays—they've a sight too much gumption It's fools like our'n—poor thing

LUTHER I've done every thing that was bad I know that

MRS PURDY Nay—nay—young fellers, they are like that But it's wrong, for look at my long lass sittin' theer on that sofey, as if 'er back wor broke

LUTHER (*loudly*) But I dunna wish I'd niver seen 'er, I dunna It wor—it wor—she wor good to me she wor, an' I dunna wish I'd niver done it

MRS PURDY Then tha ought, that's a' For I do—an' 'er does

LUTHER Does 'er say 'er wishes 'er'd niver seen me?

MRS PURDY 'Er says nowt o' nohow

LUTHER Then 'er doesna wish it An' I wish I'd ha' married 'er

MRS PURDY Come, my lad, come Married tha art—

LUTHER (*bitterly*) Married I am, an' I wish I worna Your Bertha 'er'd 'a thought a thousand times more on me than *she* does But I'm wrong, wrong, wrong, I' iver breath I take An' I will be wrong, yi, an' I *will* be wrong

MRS PURDY Hush thee—there's somebody comin

They wait

Enter JOE and MINNIE, JOE talking loudly

MINNIE No, you've not, you've no right at all (*To LUTHER*)

Haven't you even cleared away? (*To MRS PURDY*) Good evening

MRS PURDY Good evenin', missis I was just goin'—I've bin sayin' it looks very nice, th' 'ouse

MINNIE Do you think so?

MRS PURDY I do, indeed

She stuffs her handkerchief in front of her mouth, throws back her head, and snorts with laughter, having now regained her confidence LAURA *laughs in the last state of exhaustion, her hand on her breast*

HOLROYD Shall ta ha'e it then?

CLARA What do you say, Laura—are you having a drop?

LAURA (*submissively, and naturally tongue-tied*) Well—I don't mind—I will if you do

CLARA (*recklessly*) I think we'll 'ave a drop, Charlie, an' risk it It'll 'appen hold the rest down

There is a moment of silence, while HOLROYD goes into the scullery CLARA *surveys the room and the dramatic pose of MRS HOLROYD curiously*

HOLROYD (*suddenly*) Heh! What, come 'ere——!

There is a smash of pots, and a rat careers out of the scullery LAURA, *the first to see it, utters a scream, but is fastened to her chair, unable to move*

CLARA (*jumps up to the table, crying*) It's a rat— Oh, save us! (*She scrambles up, banging her head on the lamp, which swings violently*)

MRS HOLROYD (*who, with a little shriek, jerks her legs up on to the sofa, where she was stiffly reclining, now cries in despairing falsetto, stretching forth her arms*) The lamp—mind, the lamp!

CLARA *steadies the lamp, and holds her hand to her head*

HOLROYD (*coming from the scullery, a bottle of stout in his hand*) Where is he?

CLARA I believe he's gone under the sofa My, an' he's a thumper, if you like, as big as a rabbit

HOLROYD *advances cautiously toward the sofa*

LAURA (*springing suddenly into life*) Hi, hi, let me go—let me go—

Don't touch him— Where is he? (*She flees and scrambles on to CLARA'S arm-chair, catching hold of the latter's skirts*)

CLARA Hang off—do you want to have a body down— Mind, I tell you

MRS HOLROYD (*bunched up on the sofa, with crossed hands holding her arms, fascinated, watches her husband as he approaches to stoop and attack the rat, she suddenly screams*) Don't, he'll fly at you

HOLROYD He'll not get a chance

MINNIE Don't notice of the mess we're in, shall you? *He (pointing to JOE) broke the plates—and then I had to rush off up to Mrs Preston's afore I could clear away And he hasn't even mended the fire*

LUTHER I can do—I niver noticed

MINNIE (*to MRS PURDY*) Have a piece of cake? (*Goes to cupboard*)

MRS PURDY No, thanks, no, thanks I mun get off afore th' Co-op shuts up Thank yer very much Well—good night, all

JOE opens the door, MRS PURDY goes out

MINNIE (*bustling, clearing away as LUTHER comes in with coals*)

Did you settle it?

LUTHER What?

MINNIE What she'd come about

LUTHER Ah

MINNIE An' I bet you'll go and forget

LUTHER Oh ah!

MINNIE And poor old Bob Purdy will go on just the same

LUTHER Very likely

MINNIE Don't let the dust all go on the hearth Why didn't you clear away? The house was like a pigsty for her to come into

LUTHER Then I wor the pig

MINNIE (*halting*) Why—who's trod on your tail now?

LUTHER There'd be nobody to tread on it if tha wor out

MINNIE Oh—oh, dearo' me (*To JOE*) I think we'd better go to the Cinematograph, and leave him to nurse his sore tail

JOE We better had

LUTHER An' joy go with yer

MINNIE We certainly shan't leave it at home (*To JOE*) What time does it begin?

JOE Seven o'clock

MINNIE And I want to call in Sisson's shop Shall you go with me, or wouldn't you condescend to go shopping with me? (*She has cleared the table, brought a tray and a bowl, and is washing up the pots*)

JOE Dost think I'm daunted by Polly Sisson?

MINNIE You're braver than most men if you dare go in a shop Here, take a towel and wipe these pots

JOE How can I?

MINNIE: If you were a gentleman, you'd hold the plates in your teeth to wipe them.

JOE: Tha wouldna look very ladylike at th' end on't.

MINNIE: Why?

JOE: Why, hast forgot a'ready what a shine tha kicked up when I broke them two other plates? (*He has got a towel, and wedging a plate against his thighs, is laboriously wiping it*)

MINNIE: I never kicked up a shine. It is nice of you!

JOE: What?

MINNIE: To do this for me.

LUTHER *has begun sweeping the hearth.*

JOE: Tha's got two servants.

MINNIE: But I'm sure you want to smoke while you're doing it—don't you now?

JOE: Sin' tha says so. (*Fumbles in his pocket.*)

MINNIE (*hastily wiping her hands, puts a cigarette between his lips—gets matches from the mantelpiece, ignoring her husband, who is kneeling sweeping the hearth—lights his cigarette*): It's so nice to have a lamed man. You feel you've got an excuse for making a fuss of him. You've got awfully nice eyes and eyebrows. I like dark eyes.

JOE: Oh ah!

LUTHER *rises hastily, goes in the passage, crosses the room quietly. He wears his coat, a red scarf and a cap.*

MINNIE: There's more go in them than in blue. (*Watches her husband go out. There is silence between the two.*)

JOE: He'll come round again.

MINNIE: He'll have to. He'll go on sulking now. (*Her face breaks.*)

You—you don't know how hard it is.

JOE: What?

MINNIE (*crying a few fierce tears*): This . . .

JOE (*aghast*): What?

MINNIE: Why—you don't know. You don't know how hard it is, with a man as—as leaves you alone all the time

JOE: But—he niver hardly goes out.

MINNIE: No, but—you don't know—he leaves me alone, he always has done—and there's nobody . . .

JOE: But he . . .

MINNIE: He never trusts me—he leaves me so alone—and—(*a little*

burst of tears) it is hard! (*She changes suddenly*) You've wiped
your plates, my word, you are a champion

JOE I think so an' a'

MINNIE I hope the pictures will be jolly—but the sad ones make
me laugh more, don't they you?

JOE I canna do wi' 'em

CURTAIN

ACT II

The same evening—eleven o'clock. LUTHER's house.

MINNIE, *alone, weeping. She gets up, fills the kettle, puts it on the hob, sits down, weeps again; then hears somebody coming, dries her eyes swiftly, turns the lamp low.*

Enter LUTHER. He stands in the doorway—is rather tipsy; flings his cap down, sits in his chair, lurching it slightly. Neither speaks for some moments.

LUTHER: Well, did yer like yer pictures?

MINNIE: Where have you been?

LUTHER: What does it matter where I've been?

MINNIE: Have you been drinking?

LUTHER: What's it matter if I have?

MINNIE: It matters a lot to me

LUTHER: Oh ah!

MINNIE: Do you think I'm going to sleep with a man who is half-drunk?

LUTHER: Nay, I non know who tha'rt goin' ter sleep wi'.

MINNIE (*rising*): I shall make the bed in the other room.

LUTHER: Tha's no 'casions I s'll do very nicely on t' sofa; it's warmer.

MINNIE: Oh, you can have your own bed.

LUTHER: If tha doesna sleep in it, I dunna.

MINNIE: And if you *do*, I don't.

LUTHER: Tha pleases thysen. Tha can sleep by thysen for iver, if ter's a mind to't.

MINNIE (*who has stood hesitating*): Oh, very well!

She goes upstairs, returns immediately with a pillow and two blankets, which she throws on the sofa.

LUTHER: Thank yer kindly.

MINNIE: Shall you rake?

LUTHER: I'll rake.

She moves about; lays table for his morning's breakfast: a newspaper, cup, plate, etc.—no food, because it would go dry;

rinses his tin pit-bottle, puts it and his snap-bag on the table

I could do it for mysen Tha ned do nowt for me

MINNIE Why this sudden fit of unselfishness?

LUTHER I niver want thee to do nowt for me, niver no moire No,
not so much as lift a finger for me—not if I wor dyin’

MINNIE You’re not dying, you’re only tippy

LUTHER Well, it’s no matter to thee what I am

MINNIE It’s very comfortable for you to think so

LUTHER I know nowt about that

MINNIE (*after a pause*) Where have you been to-night?

LUTHER There an’ back, to see how far it is

MINNIE (*making an effort*) Have you been up to your mother’s?

LUTHER Where I’ve bin, I’ve bin, and where I haven’t, I haven’t

MINNIE Pah!—you needn’t try to magnify it and make a mountain
You’ve been to your mother’s, and then to “The Ram”

LUTHER All right—if tha knows, tha knows, an’ theer’s an end
on’t

MINNIE You talk like a fool

LUTHER That comes o’ bein’ a fool

MINNIE When were you a fool?

LUTHER Ivry day o’ my life, an’ ivry breath I’ve ta’en

MINNIE (*having finished work, sits down again*) I suppose you
haven’t got it in you to say anything fresh

LUTHER Why, what dost want me ter say? (*He looks at her for
the first time*)

MINNIE (*with a queer catch*) You might be more of a man if you
said you were sorry

LUTHER Sorry! Sorry for what?

MINNIE You’ve nothing to be sorry for, have you?

LUTHER (*looking at her, quickly*) What art goin’ ter say?

MINNIE It’s what are you going to say (*A silence*)

LUTHER (*doggedly*) I’m goin’ ter say nowt

MINNIE (*bitterly*) No, you’re not man enough to say anything—
you can only slobber You do a woman a wrong, but you’re never
man enough to say you’re sorry for it You’re not a man, you’re
not—you’re something crawling!

LUTHER I’m glad! I’m glad! I’m glad! No, an’ I wouldna ta’e’t
back, no ‘Er wor nice wi’ me, which is a thing tha’s niver bin
An’ so tha’s got it, an’ mun keep it

MINNIE: Who was nice with you?

LUTHER: *She* was—an' would ha'e bin at this minnit, but for thee.

MINNIE: Pah!—you're not fit to have a wife. You only want your mother to rock you to sleep.

LUTHER: Neither mother, nor wife, neither thee nor onybody do I want—no—no.

MINNIE: No—you've had three cans of beer.

LUTHER: An' if ter niver sleeps i' th' bed wi' me again, an' if ter niver does a hand's turn for me niver no more, I'm glad, I'm glad. I non want thee. I non want ter see thee.

MINNIE: You mean coward. Good God! I never thought you were such a mean coward as this.

LUTHER: An' as for thy money—yi, I wouldna smell on't. An' neither thine, nor our Joe's, nor my mother's will I ha'e. What I addle's my own. What I gie thee, I gie thee. An' she maun ha'e ten shillin's a month, an' tha maun abide by't.

MINNIE: What are you talking about?

LUTHER: My mother wouldna gie me th' money. She says she's done her share. An' tha's done thine. An' I've done mine, begod. An' what yer canna chew yer maun swaller.

MINNIE: You must be quite drunk.

LUTHER: Must I? Alright, it's Dutch courage then. A'right, then Dutch courage it is. But I tell thee, tha does as ter's a mind. Tha can leave me, an' go back inter service, if ter wants. What's it ter me, if I'm but a lump o' suck i' th' 'ouse wheer tha art? Tha should ha' had our Joe—he's got more go than me. An' I should ha' had 'er. I'd got go enough for *her*; 'appen a bit too much.

MINNIE: Her? Who?

LUTHER: Her! An' I'm glad 'er's wi' my childt. I'm glad I did it. I'm glad! For tha's wiped tha feet on me enough. Yi, tha's wiped thy feet on me till what's it to me if tha does it or not? It isna! An' now—tha maun abide by what ter's got, tha maun. I s'll ha'e to—an' by plenty I hadna got. I've abided. An' so—an' so—yi.

MINNIE: But who is it you—who is she?

LUTHER: Tha knowed a' along.

MINNIE: Who is it?

They are both silent.

Aren't you going to speak?

LUTHER What's the good?

MINNIE (*coldly*) But I must know

LUTHER Tha does know

MINNIE I can assure you I don't

LUTHER Then assure thysen an' find out

Another silence

MINNIE Do you mean somebody is going to have a baby by you?

LUTHER I mean what I've said, an' I mean nowt else

MINNIE But you must tell me

LUTHER I've boiled my cabbage twice a'ready, hanna I'

MINNIE Do you mean somebody is going to have a child by you?

LUTHER Tha can chew it ower, if ter's a mind

MINNIE (*helpless*) But (*She struggles with herself, then goes calm*)

LUTHER That's what I say—but

A silence

MINNIE And who is she?

LUTHER Thee, for a' I know

MINNIE (*calmly, patiently*) I asked you a question

LUTHER Ah—an' I 'eered thee

MINNIE Then answer me—who is she?

LUTHER Tha knows well enow—tha knowed afore they'd tow'd, thee—

MINNIE Nobody has told me Who is she?

LUTHER Well, tha's seed 'er mother

MINNIE (*numb*) Mrs Purdy?

LUTHER Y1

MINNIE Their Bertha?

LUTHER Y1

A silence

MINNIE Why didn't you tell me?

LUTHER Tell thee what?

MINNIE This

LUTHER Tha knowed afore I did

MINNIE I know now

LUTHER Me an' a'

A pause

MINNIE Didn't you know till to-night?

LUTHER Our Joe telled me when tha'd just gone—I niver dreamt afore—an' then 'er mother

MINNIE What did her mother come for?

LUTHER Ter see if we could hush it up a'cause o' thee, an' gi'e 'er a lump sum

MINNIE Hush it up because of me?

LUTHER Ah—lay it ont'r an electrician as wor wi' th' gang as laid th' cable down to Balford—he's gone God knows where

MINNIE But it's yours

LUTHER I know that

MINNIE Then why lay it onto somebody else?

LUTHER Because o' thee

MINNIE But why because of me?

LUTHER To stop thee knowin', I s'd think

MINNIE And why shouldn't I know?

LUTHER Eh, I dunno

A pause

MINNIE And what were you going to do to stop me knowing?

LUTHER 'Er axed for forty pounds down

MINNIE And if you paid forty pounds, you got off scot-free?

LUTHER Summat so

MINNIE And where were the forty pounds coming from?

LUTHER Our Joe said 'e'd lend 'em me I thought my mother would, but 'er said 'er wouldna—neither would she gi'e't our Joe ter lend me, she said For I wor a married man now, an' it behoved my wife to look after me An' I thought tha knowed I thought tha'd twigged, else bin telled An' I didna care, an' dunna care

MINNIE And this is what you married me to!

LUTHER This is what tha married me to But I'll niver ax thee for, no, not so much as the lftin' of a finger—no——

MINNIE But when you wrote and told me you were willing to marry me, why didn't you tell me this?

LUTHER Because—as I've telled thee—I didna know till this very mortal night

MINNIE But you knew you'd been with her

LUTHER Ay, I knowed that

A pause

MINNIE And why didn't you tell me?

LUTHER What for should I tell thee? What good would it ha' done thee? Tha niver tow'd *me* nowt

MINNIE So that is how you look at it?

LUTHER I non care how I look at it

A pause

MINNIE And was there anybody else?

LUTHER How dost mean?

MINNIE Have you been with any other woman?

LUTHER I dunno—I might—I dunno

MINNIE That means you have

LUTHER I'm thirty

MINNIE And who *were* they?

LUTHER I dunno I've niver bin much wi' anybody—little, very little—an' then it wor an off-chance Our Joe wor more that way than me—I worn't that way

A pause

MINNIE So—this was what I waited for you for!

LUTHER Yha niver waited for me Tha had me a'cause tha couldna get nobody better

MINNIE And so—

LUTHER (*after a moment*) Y1, an' so An' so, I non care what ter does If ter leaves me—

MINNIE (*in a flash*) What's the good of me leaving you? Aren't I married to you—tied to you?

LUTHER Tha could leave me whether or not I should go t'r Australia wi' our Joe

MINNIE And what about that girl?

LUTHER I should send 'er th' money

MINNIE And what about me?

LUTHER Tha'd please thysen

MINNIE Should you *like* me to leave you, and let you go to Australia?

LUTHER 'Appen I should

MINNIE What did you marry me for?

LUTHER 'Cos tha axed *mē*

MINNIE Did you never care for me?

He does not answer

Didn't you?

He does not answer

Didn't you?

LUTHER (*slowly*) You niver wanted me—you thought me dirt

MINNIE Ha' (*A pause*) You can have the forty pounds

LUTHER (*very doggedly*) I shanna

MINNIE She's got to be paid

LUTHER Tha keeps thy money

MINNIE Then where shall you get it from?

LUTHER I s'll pay 'er month by month

MINNIE But you can't Think'

LUTHER Then I'll borrow forty quid somewhere else, an' pay it
back i' instalments Tha keeps thy money

MINNIE You can borrow it from me

LUTHER I shall not

MINNIE Very well I only wanted not to have the bother of pay-
ing month by month I think I shall go back to my old place

LUTHER Tha pleases thysen

MINNIE And you can go and live with your mother again

LUTHER That I should niver do—but tha pleases thysen We've
bin married seven wik come Tuesday

MINNIE I niver ought to ha' done it

LUTHER What?

MINNIE Married you

LUTHER No

MINNIE For you never cared enough

LUTHER Yı—it's my fault

MINNIE Yes

LUTHER It would be Tha's niver made a fault i' thy life

MINNIE Who are you, to talk about my faults'

LUTHER Well——

A pause

MINNIE I shall write to Mr Westlake to-morrow

LUTHER Tha does as pleases thee

MINNIE And if they can't take me back straight away, I shall ask
him if he knows another place

LUTHER A'right An' we'll sell th' furniture

MINNIE (*looking round at her home*) Yes

LUTHER It'll non bring ha'ef tha giv for't—but it'll bring enough
ter ta'e me out theer

MINNIE I'll make up what you lose by it, since I chose it

MRS HOLROYD He will, he will—and they're poisonous' (*She ends on a very high note Leaning forward on the sofa as far as she dares, she stretches out her arms to keep back her husband, who is about to kneel and search under the sofa for the rat*)

HOLROYD Come off, I canna see him

MRS HOLROYD I won't let you, he'll fly at you

HOLROYD I'll settle him——

MRS HOLROYD Open the door and let him go

HOLROYD I shonna I'll settle him Shut thy claver He'll non come anigh thee

He kneels down and begins to creep to the sofa With a great bound, MRS HOLROYD flies to the door and flings it open Then she rushes back to the couch

CLARA There he goes'

HOLROYD (*simultaneously*) Hi'—Ussza' (*He flings the bottle of stout out of the door*)

LAURA (*piteously*) Shut the door, do

HOLROYD rises, dusting his trousers knees, and closes the door

LAURA heavily descends and drops in the chair

CLARA Here, come an' help us down, Charlie Look at her, she's going off

Though LAURA is still purple-red, she sinks back in the chair HOLROYD goes to the table CLARA places her hands on his shoulders and jumps lightly down Then she pushes HOLROYD with her elbow

Look sharp, get a glass of water

She unfastens LAURA's collar and pulls off the paper bonnet MRS HOLROYD sits up, straightens her clothing, and tries to look cold and contemptuous HOLROYD brings a cup of water CLARA sprinkles her friend's face LAURA sighs and sighs again very deeply, then draws herself up painfully

CLARA (*tenderly*) Do you feel any better—shall you have a drink of water?

(*LAURA mournfully shakes her head, CLARA turns sharply to HOLROYD*)

She'll 'ave a drop o' something

HOLROYD goes out CLARA meanwhile fans her friend with a handkerchief HOLROYD brings stout She pours out the stout, smells the glass, smells the bottle—then finally the cork

LUTHER Tha can give ter them as'll ha'e

MINNIE But I shall feel I owe it you

LUTHER I've had six weeks o' married life wi' thee I mun pay for that

MINNIE You are mean, mean

LUTHER I know—though tha'rt first as has telled me so When dost reckon tha'lt go?

MINNIE I'll go to-morrow if you want to get rid of me

LUTHER Nay—tha does just as pleases thysen I non want ter get rid on thee Nay, nay, it's not that It's thee as wants ter go

MINNIE At any rate, I s'll have a place inside a fortnight

LUTHER (*dully*) Alright

MINNIE So I shall have to trouble you till then

LUTHER But I dunna want thee ter do owt for me—no, I dunna

MINNIE I shall keep the house, in payment for my board and lodgings And I'll make the bed up in the back room, and I'll sleep there, because it's not furnished, and the house is yours

LUTHER Th'art—tha'rt—I wish I might strike thee down!

MINNIE And I shall keep the account of every penny I spend, and you must just pay the bills

LUTHER (*rising suddenly*) I'll murder thee afore tha does

He goes out She sits twisting her apron He returns with a large lump of coal in his hands, and rakes the fire

MINNIE You cared more for her than for me

LUTHER For who?

MINNIE For her She was the sort of sawney you ought to have had Did she think you perfect?

LUTHER (*with grim satisfaction*) She liked me

MINNIE And you could do just as you wanted with her?

LUTHER She'd ha' done owt for me

MINNIE And it flattered you, did it? Because a long stalk wi' no flower was at your service, it flattered you, did it? My word, it ought— As for your Joe, he's not a fool like you, and that's why women think more of him He wouldn't want a Bertha Purdy He'd get a woman who was something—and because he knew how to appreciate her You—what good are you?

LUTHER I'm no good, but to fetch an' carry

MINNIE And a tuppenny scullery-girl could do that as well

LUTHER Alright

MINNIE I'll bet even Bertha Purdy thinks what a clown you are
She never wanted you to marry her, did she?

LUTHER She knowed I wouldn't

MINNIE You flatter yourself I'll bet she never wanted you I
shouldn't be surprised if the child isn't somebody else's, that she
just foists on you because you're so soft

LUTHER Oh ah!

MINNIE It even flatters you to think it's yours

LUTHER Oh ah!

MINNIE And quite right too—for it's the only thing you could have
to be proud of And then really it's not you

LUTHER Oh ah!

MINNIE If a woman has a child, and you think you're the cause,
do you think it's *your* doings?

LUTHER If tha has one, it will be

MINNIE And is *that* anything for you to be proud of? Me whom
you've insulted and deceived and treated as no snail would treat
a woman! And then you expect me to bear your children!

LUTHER I dunna expect thee If tha does tha does

MINNIE And you gloat over it and feel proud of it!

LUTHER Yi, I do

MINNIE No—no! I'd rather have married a tramp off the streets
than you And—and I don't believe you *can* have children

LUTHER Theer tha knows tha'rt a liar

MINNIE I hate you

LUTHER Alright

MINNIE And I *will* leave you, I *will*

LUTHER Tha's said so afore

MINNIE And I mean it

LUTHER Alright

MINNIE But it's your mother's doing *She* mollycoddled and
marded you till you weren't a man—and now—I have to pay
for it

LUTHER Oh ah!

MINNIE No, you're not a man!

LUTHER Alright They's plenty of women as would say I am

MINNIE They'd be lying to get something out of you

LUTHER Why, what could they get out of me?

MINNIE Yes—yes—what could they (She stutters to a close)

He begins to take off his boots

LUTHER If tha'rt goin', tha'd 'better go afore th' strike begins We should be on short commons then—ten bob a wik

MINNIE There's one thing, you'd be on short commons without me For nobody would keep you for ten shillings a week, unless you went to your mother's

LUTHER I could live at our Harriet's, an' pay 'er off after An' there'd be th' furniture sold

MINNIE And you'd be delighted if there *was* a strike, so you could loaf about You don't even get drunk You only loaf You're lazy, lazy, and without the stomach of a louse You *want* a strike

LUTHER Alright

MINNIE And I hope you'll get what you deserve, I do

LUTHER Tha'rt gi'en it me

MINNIE (*lifting her hand suddenly*) How *dare* you say so—how *dare* you! I'm too good for you

LUTHER (*sullenly*) I know

MINNIE Yes

She gets a candle, lights it, and goes to bed He flings off his scarf and coat and waistcoat, throws the pillow on the hearth-rug, wraps himself in the blankets, blows the lamp out, and lies down

CURTAIN

ACT III

A fortnight later—afternoon The kitchen of LUTHER GASCOIGNE'S house

MRS GASCOIGNE, *senior, alone Enter MINNIE GASCOIGNE, dressed from travelling She is followed by a CABMAN carrying a bag*

MRS GASCOIGNE What—is it you!

MINNIE Yes Didn't you get my wire?

MRS GASCOIGNE Thy wire! Dost mean a tallygram? No, we'n had nowt though th' house 'as bin shut up

MINNIE (*to the CABMAN*) Thank you How much?

CABMAN Ha'ef-a-crown

MRS GASCOIGNE Ha'ef-a-crown foi commin' from th' Midland station! Why, tha non know what's talkin' about

MINNIE (*paying him*) Thank you

CABMAN Thank yer Good afternoon

The CABMAN goes out

MRS GASCOIGNE My word, tha knows how ter ma'e th' money fly

MINNIE I couldn't carry a bag

MRS GASCOIGNE Tha could ha' come i' th' 'bus ter Eastwood an' then a man 'ud 'a browt it on

MINNIE It is raining

MRS GASCOIGNE Tha'rt neither sugar nor salt

MINNIE I wonder you didn't get my telegram

MRS GASCOIGNE I tell thee, th' 'ouse wor shut up last night

MINNIE Oh!

MRS GASCOIGNE I dunno wheer 'e slep'—wi' some o's pals I should think

MINNIE Oh!

MRS GASCOIGNE Thinks I to mysep, I'd better go an' get some dinner ready down theer So I telled our Joe ter come 'ere for's dinner as well, but they'm neither on 'em bin in yet That's allers t'road when it's strike They stop mormin' about, bletherin' and boomn' an' meals, bless yer, they don't count Tha's bin i' Manchester four days then?

MINNIE Yes

MRS GASCOIGNE Ay—Our Luther's niver bin up ter tell me If I hadna ha' met Mrs Pervin fra next door here, I should niver ha' knowed a word That wor yisterday So I sent our Joe down But it seems 'e's neither bin a-whoam yesterday nor th' day afore He slep' i' th' 'ouse by hissen for two nights So Mrs Sharley said He said tha'd gone ter Manchester on business

MINNIE Yes

MRS GASCOIGNE But he niver come ter tell *me* nowt on't

MINNIE Didn't he?

MRS GASCOIGNE It's trew what they say

“My son's my son till he ta'es him a wife,

But my daughter's my daughter the whole of her life”

MINNIE Do you think so?

MRS GASCOIGNE I'm sure An' th' men's been out ten days now, an' such carryin's-on

MINNIE Oh! Why—what?

MRS GASCOIGNE Meetin's ivry mornin'—crier for ever down th' street wi's bell—an' agitators They say as Fraser dursn't venture out o' th' door Watna' pit-top's bin afire, and there's a rigiment o' soldiers drillin' i' th' statutes ground—bits o' things they are, an' a', like a lot o' little monkeys i' their red coats—Staffordshire men But wiry, so they say Same as marched wi' Lord Roberts to Candyhar But not a man among 'em If you watch out fra th' gardin end, you'll see 'em i' th' colliers' train goin' up th' line ter Watna'—wi' their red coats jammed i' th' winders They say as Fraser's got ten on 'em in's house ter guard him—an' they's sentinels at pit top, standin' wi' their guns, an' th' men crackin' their sides wi' laughing at 'em

MINNIE What for?

MRS GASCOIGNE Nay, that I canna tell thee They've got the Black Watch up at Heanor—so they says—great big Scotchmen i' kilts They look well, ha'en them i' Heanor, wi' a' them lasses

MINNIE And what is all the fuss about?

MRS GASCOIGNE Riotin' I thought tha'd bobbled off ter Manchester ter be i' safety

MINNIE Oh, no—I never knew there was any danger

MRS GASCOIGNE No more there is, as far as that goes What's up atween you an' our Luther?

MINNIE Oh, nothing particular

MRS GASCOIGNE I knowed summat wor amiss, when 'e niver come up It's a fortnight last Tuesday, sin' 'e's set foot i' my house— an' I've niver clapt eyes on him I axed our Joe, but he's as stubborn as a jackass, an' you canna get a word out on 'im, not for love nor money

MINNIE Oh!

MRS GASCOIGNE Talks o' goin' t'r Australay But not if I can help it An' hints as if our Luther—you not thinkin' of it, are you?

MINNIE No, I'm not—not that I know of

MRS GASCOIGNE H'm! It's a rum go, when nobody seems ter know where they are, nor what they're goin' ter do But there's more blort than bustle, i' this world What took thee to Manchester?

MINNIE Oh, I just wanted to go, on business

MRS GASCOIGNE Summat about thy money, like?

MINNIE Yes

MRS GASCOIGNE Our Luther wor axin' me for forty pound, th' last time 'e wor up—but I didna see it No—I fun' him a' as 'e wanted for's marriage, and gen 'im ten pound i' hand, an' I thought it 'ud suffice An' as for forty pound—it's ter much, that's what I think

MINNIE I don't

MRS GASCOIGNE Oh, well, if tha doesna, a' well an' good 'Appen he's paid it, then?

MINNIE Paid it! Why, wheer was he to get it from?

MRS GASCOIGNE I thought you had it atween you

MINNIE We haven't

MRS GASCOIGNE Why, how dost mean?

MINNIE I mean we've neither of us got as much as forty pounds

MRS GASCOIGNE Dost mean *tha* hasna?

MINNIE No, I haven't

MRS GASCOIGNE What's a-gait now?

MINNIE Nothing

MRS GASCOIGNE What hast bin up to?

MINNIE I? Nothing I went to Manchester to settle a little business, that's all

MRS GASCOIGNE And wheer did ter stop?

MINNIE I stayed with my old master

MRS GASCOIGNE Wor there no missis, then?

MINNIE No—his wife is dead You know I was governess for his grandchildren, who were born in India

MRS GASCOIGNE H'm! So tha went to see *him*?

MINNIE Yes—I've always told him everything

MRS GASCOIGNE So tha went clat-fartin' ter 'im about our Luther, did ter?

MINNIE Well—he's the only soul in the world that I *can* go to

MRS GASCOIGNE H'm! It doesna become thee, methinks

MINNIE Well!

Footsteps are heard

MRS GASCOIGNE Here's them lads, I s'd think

Enter LUTHER and JOE

JOE (*to MINNIE*) Hello! has thee come?

MINNIE Yes I sent a wire, and thought someone might come to meet me

JOE Nay, there wor no wire We thought tha'd gone for good

MINNIE Who thought so?

JOE Well—didna tha say so?

MINNIE Say what?

JOE As tha'd go, an' he could do what he liked?

MINNIE I've said many things

MRS GASCOIGNE So that was how it stood! Tha'rt a fool, our Luther

If ter ta'es a woman at 'er word, well, tha deserves what ter gets

LUTHER What am I to do, might I ax?

MRS GASCOIGNE Nay, that thy wits should tell thee Wheer hast bin these two days?

LUTHER I walked ower wi' Jim Horrocks ter their Annie's i' Mansfield

MRS GASCOIGNE I'm sure she'd got enough to do, without two men planting themselves on her An' how did ter get back?

LUTHER Walked

MRS GASCOIGNE Trapsein' thy shoe-leather off thee feet, walkin' twenty miles Hast had thy dinner?

JOE We've both had free dinners at th' Methodist Chapel

LUTHER I met Tom Heseldine i' "Th' Badger Box", Mother

MRS GASCOIGNE Oh ay! Wide-mouthed as iver, I reckon

JOE Just same But what dost think, Mother? It's leaked out as Fraser's got a lot o' chaps to go to-morrer mornin', ter see after th' roads an' a' that

MRS GASCOIGNE Th' roads wants keepin' safe, dunna they'

JOE Y1—but if th' mesters wanna ha'e th' union men, let 'em do it theirselves

MRS GASCOIGNE Tha talks like a fool

LUTHER What right ha' they ter get a lot of scawdrags an' black-legs in ter do our work? A' th' pit maun fa' in, if they wanna settle it fair wi' us

JOE Then workin's is ours, an' th' mesters' If th' mesters wanna treat us fair, then they mun keep 'em right theirselves They non goin' ter ha'e no thir'd body in

MINNIE But even when it's settled, how are you going back, if the roof has come in, and the roads are gone?

JOE Tha mun ax th' mesters that If we canna go back ter th' rotten owd pits no more, we mun look elsewheie An' th' mesters can sit atop o' their pits an' stroke 'em

LUTHER (to MINNIE) If I got a woman in to do th' housework as tha wanna do for me, tha'd sit smilin', shouldn't ter?

MINNIE She could do as she liked

LUTHER Alright Then, Mother, 'appen tha'lt boss this house She run off ter Manchester, an' left me ter starve So 'appen tha'lt come an' do for me

MRS GASCOIGNE Nay—if ter wants owt tha mun come ter me

JOE That's right Dunna thee play blackleg i' this establishment

MRS GASCOIGNE I s'll mind my own business

JOE (to MINNIE) Now, does *thee* think it right, Minnie, as th' mesters should get a lot o' crawlin' buggers in ter keep their pits i' order, when th' keepin' o' them pits i' order belongs by right to us?

MINNIE It belongs to whosoever the masters pay to do it

LUTHER A' right Then it belongs to me to ha'e any woman in ter do for me, as I've a mind Tha's gone on strike, so I ha'e the right ter get anybody else

MINNIE When have I gone on strike? I have always done your housework

LUTHER Housework—y1! But we dunna on'y keep th' roof from comin' in We get as well An' even th' housework tha went on strike wi' Tha skedaddled off ter Manchester, an' left me to't

MINNIE I went on business

LUTHER An' we've come out on strike "on business"

MINNIE You've not, it's a game

LUTHER An' the mesters'll ta'e us back when they're ready, or when they're forced to An' same wi' thee by me

MINNIE Oh!

JOE We got it fr' Tom Rooke—'e wor goin' ter turn 'em down At four to-morrer mornin', there's ower twenty men goin' down

MRS GASCOIGNE What a lot of fools men are! As if th' pits didn't need ter be kep' tidy, ready for you to go back to'm

JOE They'll be kep' tidy by us, then an' when we've a mind—an' by nobody else

MRS GASCOIGNE Tha talks very high an' mighty That's because I ha'e th' feedin' on thee

JOE You put it like our Luther says, then He stands for t'mesters, an' Minnie stands for t'men—cos 'er's gone on strike Now becos she's went ter Manchester, had he got ony right ter ha'e Lizzie Charley in for a couple o' nights an' days?

MRS GASCOIGNE Tha talks like a fool!

JOE I dunna

MINNIE He's welcome to Lizzie Charley

JOE Alright—She's a nice gel We'll ax 'er to come in an' manage th' 'ouse—he can pay 'er

MINNIE What with?

JOE Niver you mind Should yer like it?

MINNIE He can do just as he likes

JOE Then should I fetch her?—should I, Luther?

LUTHER If ter's a mind

JOE Should I, then, Minnie?

MINNIE If he wants her

LUTHER I want somebody ter look after me

JOE Right tha art (*Puts his cap on*) I'll say as Minnie canna look after th' house, will 'er come That it?

LUTHER Ah

MRS GASCOIGNE Dunna be a fool Tha's had a can or two

JOE Well—'er'll be glad o' the job

MRS GASCOIGNE You'd better stop him, one of you

LUTHER I want somebody ter look after me—an' tha wunna

MRS GASCOIGNE Eh dear o' me! Dunna thee be a fool, our Joe

Exit JOE

What wor this job about goin' ter Manchester?

LUTHER She said she wouldna live wi' me, an' so 'er went I thought
'er'd gone for good

MINNIE You didn't—you *knew*

LUTHER I knowed what tha'd tow'd me—as tha'd live wi' me no
longer Tha's come back o' thy own accord

MINNIE I never said I shouldn't come back

LUTHER Tha said as tha wouldna live wi' me An' tha *didna*,
neither,—not for—

MRS GASCOIGNE Well, Minnie, you've brought it on your own head
You put him off, an' you put him off, as if 'e was of no account,
an' then all of a sudden you invited him to marry you—

MINNIE Put him off! He didn't need much putting off He never
came any faster than a snail

MRS GASCOIGNE Twice, to my knowledge, he axed thee—an' what
can a man do more?

MINNIE Yes, what! A gramophone in breeches could do as much

MRS GASCOIGNE Oh, indeed! What ailed him was, he wor in
collier's britches, i'stead o' a stool-arsed Jack's

MINNIE No—what ailed him was that you kept him like a kid
hanging on to you

MRS GASCOIGNE An' tha bit thy own nose off, when ter said him
nay For had ter married him at twenty-three, there'd ha' been
none of this trouble

MINNIE And why didn't I? Why didn't I? Because he came in his
half-hearted "I will if you like" fashion, and I despised him, yes
I did

MRS GASCOIGNE And who are *you* to be despising him, I should like
to know?

MINNIE I'm a woman, and that's enough But I know now, it was
your fault You held him, and persuaded him that what he
wanted was *you* You kept him, like a child, you even gave him
what money he wanted, like a child He never roughed it—he
never faced out anything You did all that for him

MRS GASCOIGNE And what if I did! If you made as good a wife to
him as I made a mother, you'd do

MINNIE Should I? You didn't care what women your sons went
with, so long as they didn't love them What do you care really
about this affair of Bertha Purdy? You don't All you cared
about was to keep your sons for yourself You kept the solid

Eh, mester, it's all of a work—it's had a foisty cork

At that instant the stairfoot door opens slowly, revealing the children—the girl peering over the boy's shoulder—both in white nightgowns Everybody starts LAURA gives a little cry, piesses her hand on her bosom, and sinks back, gasping

CLARA (*appealing and anxious, to MRS HOLROYD*) You don't 'appen to 'ave a drop of brandy for her, do you, missis?

MRS HOLROYD *rises coldly without replying, and goes to the stairfoot door where the children stand*

MRS HOLROYD (*sternly, to the children*) Go to bed!

JACK What's a matter, mother?

MRS HOLROYD Never you mind, go to bed!

CLARA (*appealingly*) Be quick, missis

MRS HOLROYD, *glancing round, sees LAURA going purple, and runs past the children upstairs The boy and girl sit on the lowest stair Their father goes out of the house, shamefaced MRS HOLROYD runs downstairs with a little brandy in a large bottle*

CLARA Thanks, awfully (*To LAURA*) Come on, try an' drink a drop, there's a dear

They administer brandy to LAURA The children sit watching, open-eyed The girl stands up to look

MINNIE (*whispering*) I believe it's blue bonnet

JACK (*whispering*) It isn't—she's in a fit

MINNIE (*whispering*) Well, look under th' table—JACK *peers under*—there's 'er bonnet (*JACK creeps forward*) Come back, our Jack

JACK (*returns with the bonnet*) It's all made of paper

MINNIE Let's have a look—it's stuck together, not sewed

She tries it on HOLROYD enters—he looks at the child

MRS HOLROYD (*sharply, glancing round*) Take that off!

MINNIE *hurriedly takes the bonnet from her head Her father snatches it from her and puts it on the fire*

CLARA There, you're coming round now, love

MRS HOLROYD *turns away She sees HOLROYD's eyes on the brandy-bottle, and immediately removes it, corking it up*

MRS HOLROYD (*to CLARA*) You will not need this any more?

CLARA No, thanks I'm very much obliged

MRS HOLROYD (*does not unbend, but speaks coldly to the children*)

Come, this is no place for you—come back to bed

MINNIE No, mam, I don't want to

meal, and the orts and slarts any other woman could have But I tell you, I'm *not* for having the orts and slarts, and your leavings from your sons I'll have a man, or nothing, I will

MRS GASCOIGNE It's rare to be some folks, ter pick and choose

MINNIE I can't pick and choose, no But what I won't have, I won't have, and that is all

MRS GASCOIGNE (*to LUTHER*) Have I ever kept thee from doin' as tha wanted? Have I iver marded and coddled thee?

LUTHER Tha hasna, beguy!

MINNIE No, you haven't, perhaps, not by the look of things But you've bossed him You've decided everything for him, really He's depended on you as much when he was thirty as when he was three You told him what to do, and he did it

MRS GASCOIGNE My word, I've never known all he did

MINNIE You have—everything that mattered You maybe didn't know it was Bertha Purdy, but you knew it was some woman like her, and what did you care? *She* had the orts and slarts, you kept your son And you want to keep him, even now Yes—and you do keep him

MRS GASCOIGNE We're learnin' a thing or two, Luther

LUTHER Ay

Enter JOE

MINNIE Yes! What did you care about the woman who would have to take some after you? Nothing! You left her with just the slarts of a man Yes

MRS GASCOIGNE Indeed! I canna see as you're so badly off You've got a husband as doesn't drink, as waits on you hand and foot, as gives you a free hand in everything It's you as doesn't know when you're well off, madam

MINNIE I'd rather have had a husband who knocked me about than a husband who was good to me because he belonged to his mother He doesn't and can't *really* care for me You stand before him His *real* caring goes to you Me he only wants sometimes

JOE She'll be in in a minute .

MRS GASCOIGNE Tha'rt the biggest fool an' jackanapes, our Joe, as iver God made

MINNIE If she crosses that doorstep, then I go for good

MRS GASCOIGNE (*bursting into fury—to JOE*) Tha see what thy bobby interferin' has done

JOE Nay—that's how it stood

MRS GASCOIGNE Tha mun go an' stop her, our Luther Tell 'er it
wor our Joe's foolery An' look sharp

LUTHER What should I go for?

LUTHER goes out, furious

MINNIE You see—you see! His mother's word is law to him He'd
do what I told him, but his *feel* would be for you He's got no
feeling for me You keep all that

MRS GASCOIGNE You talk like a jealous woman

MINNIE I do! And for that matter, why doesn't Joe marry, either?
Because you keep him too You know, in spite of his bluster, he
cares more for your little finger than he does for all the women
in the world—or ever will And it's wrong—it's wrong How is a
woman ever to have a husband, when the men all belong to their
mothers? It's wrong

MRS GASCOIGNE Oh, indeed!—is it? You know, don't you? You
know everything

MINNIE I know this, because I've suffered from it Your elder sons
you let go, and they *are* husbands But your young sons you've
kept And Luther is your son, and the man that lives with me
But first, he's your son And Joe ought never to marry, for he'd
break a woman's heart

MRS GASCOIGNE Tha hears, lad! We're bein' told off

JOE Ah, I hear An' what's more, it's true, Mother

MINNIE It is—it is He only likes playing round me and getting
some pleasure out of teasing me, because he knows I'm safely
married to Luther, and can never look to him to marry me and
belong to me He's safe, so he likes me If I were single, he'd be
frightened to death of me

JOE Happen I should

MRS GASCOIGNE Tha'rt a fool

MINNIE And that's what you've done to me—that's my life spoiled
—spoiled—ay, worse than if I'd had a drunken husband that
knocked me about For it's dead

MRS GASCOIGNE Tha'it shoutin' because nowt ails thee—that's
what tha art

JOE Nay, Mother, tha knows it's right Tha knows tha's got me—
an'll ha'e me till ter dies—an' after that—y!

MRS GASCOIGNE Tha talks like a fool

JOE And sometimes, Mother, I wish I wor dead, I do

MINNIE You see, you see! You see what you've done to them It's strong women like you, who were too much for their husbands—ah!

JOE Tha knows I couldna leave thee, Mother—tha knows I couldna An' me, a young man, belongs to thy owd age An' there's no wheer for me to go, Mother For tha'rt gettin' nearer to death an' yet I canna leave thee to go my own road An' I wish, y1, often, as I wor dead

MRS GASCOIGNE Dunna, lad—dunna let 'er put these ideas i' thy head

JOE An' I can but fritter my days away There's no goin' forrard for me

MRS GASCOIGNE Nay, lad, nay—what lad's better off than thee, dost reckon?

JOE If I went t'r Australia, th' best part on me wouldna go wi' me

MRS GASCOIGNE Tha wunna go t'r Australia!

JOE If I went, I should be a husk of a man I'm allers a husk of a man, Mother There's nowt sōld about me The' isna

MRS GASCOIGNE Wha'tiver dost mean? You've a' set on me at once

JOE I'm nowt, Mother, an' I count for nowt Y1, an' I know it

MRS GASCOIGNE Tha does Tha sounds as if tha counts for nowt, as a rule, doesn't ter?

JOE There's not much of a man about me T'other chaps is more of fools, but they more of men an' a—an' they know it

MRS GASCOIGNE That's thy fault

JOE Y1—an' will be—ter th' end o' th' chapter

Enter LUTHER

MINNIE Did you tell her?

LUTHER Yes

MINNIE We'll have some tea, should we?

JOE Ay, let's For it's bin dry work

She sets the kettle on

MRS GASCOIGNE I mun be goin'

MINNIE Wait and have a cup of tea I brought a cake

JOE But we non goin' ter ha'e it, are we, Luther, these 'ere black-legs goin' down interferin'

LUTHER We arena

MRS GASCOIGNE But how are you going to stop them?

JOE We s'll manage it, one road or t'other

MRS GASCOIGNE You'll non go gettin' yourselves into trouble

LUTHER We in trouble enow

MINNIE If you'd have had Lizzie Charley in, what should you have paid her with?

LUTHER We should ha' found the money somewhere

MINNIE Do you know what I had to keep house on this week, Mother?

MRS GASCOIGNE Not much, sin' there wor nowt but ten shillin' strike pay

MINNIE He gave me five shillings

LUTHER Tha could ha' had what things ter wanted on strap

MINNIE No—but why should you keep, to drink on, as much as you give me to keep house on? Five shillings!

JOE Five bob's non a whackin' sight o' pocket money for a man's week

MINNIE It is, if he earns nothing It was that as finished me off

JOE Well, *tha* niver ned go short—*tha* can let *him*

MINNIE I knew that was what *he* thought But if he wouldna have my money for one thing, he wasn't going to for another

MRS GASCOIGNE Why, what wouldn't he have it for?

MINNIE He wouldn't have that forty pounds, when I went on my knees to beg and beseech him to

LUTHER Tha did! Tha throwed it at me as if I wor a beggar as stank

MINNIE And you wouldn't have it when I asked you

LUTHER No—an' wouldna ha'e it now

MINNIE You can't

LUTHER I dunna want it

MINNIE And if you don't find money to keep the house on, we shall both of us starve For you've got to keep me And I've got no money of my own now

LUTHER Why, what dost mean?

MINNIE I mean what I say

MRS GASCOIGNE Why, what?

MINNIE I was sick of having it between us It was but a hundred and twenty So I went to Manchester and spent it

MRS GASCOIGNE Tha's bin an' spent a hundred and twenty pound
i' four days?

MINNIE Yes, I have

MRS GASCOIGNE Whativer are we comin' to!

JOE That wor a stroke worth two Tell us what tha bought

MINNIE I bought myself a ring, for one thing I thought if I ever
had any children, and they asked me where was my engagement
ring, I should have to show them something, for their father's
sake Do you like it? (*Holds out her hand to JOE*)

JOE My word, but that's a bobby-dazzler Look, Mother

MRS GASCOIGNE H'm

JOE takes the ring off

JOE My word, but that's a diamond, if you like How much did
it cost?

MINNIE Thirty pounds I've got the bill in my pocket

MRS GASCOIGNE I only hope you'll niver come to want some
day

MINNIE Luther must see to that

JOE And what else did ter buy?

MINNIE I'll show you (*Gets her bag, unlocks it, takes out three
prints*)

JOE I dunna reckon much ter these

MRS GASCOIGNE Nor me neither An' how much has ter gen for
them apiece?

MINNIE That was twenty-five pounds They're beautiful prints

MRS GASCOIGNE I dunna believe a word tha says

MINNIE I'll show you the bill My master's a collector, and he
picked them for me He says they're well worth the money And
I like them

MRS GASCOIGNE Well, I niver seed such a job in my life T-t-t-t!
Well, a' I can say is, I hope tha'll niver come ter want Throwin'
good money i' th' gutter like this Nay, I feel fair bad Nay!
T-t-t-t! Such tricks! And such bits o' dirty paper!

JOE I'd rather ha'e the Co-op almanack

MRS GASCOIGNE So would I, any day! What dost say to't, our
Luther?

LUTHER 'Er does as 'er likes

MINNIE I had a lovely time with Mr Westlake, choosing them at
the dealer's He is clever

MRS GASCOIGNE Tha tow'd him tha wanted to get rid o' thy money, did ter?

MINNIE No—I said I wanted some pictures for the parlour, and asked him if he'd help me choose

MRS GASCOIGNE Good money thrown away Maybe the very bread of your children

MINNIE Nay, that's Luther's duty to provide

MRS GASCOIGNE Well, a' I can say is, I hope you may never come ter want If our Luther died

MINNIE I should go back to work

MRS GASCOIGNE But what if tha'd three or four children?

MINNIE A hundred and twenty pounds wouldn't make much odds then

MRS GASCOIGNE Well, a' I can say, I hope tha'lt niver live ter rue the day

JOE What dost think on 'er, Luther?

LUTHER Nay, she's done as she liked with her own

MINNIE (*emptying her purse in her lap*) I've got just seventeen shillings You drew your strike pay yesterday How much have you got of that, Luther?

LUTHER Three bob

MINNIE And do you want to keep it?

LUTHER Ah

MINNIE Very well I shall spend this seventeen shillings till it's gone, and then we shall have to live on soup-tickets

MRS GASCOIGNE I'll back my life!

JOE And who'll fetch the soup?

MINNIE Oh, I shall I've been thinking, that big jug will do nicely I'm in the same boat as other men's wives now, and so I must do the same

JOE They'll g'e you strap at West's

MINNIE I'm not going to run up bills, no, I'm not I'll go to the free teas, and fetch soup, an' with ten shillings a week we shall manage

MRS GASCOIGNE Well, that's one road, lass

MINNIE It's the only one And now, if he can provide, he must, and if he can't, he must tell me so, and I'll go back into service, and not be a burden to him

MRS GASCOIGNE High and mighty, high and mighty! We'll see,
my lass, we'll see

MINNIE That's all we can do

MRS GASCOIGNE Tha doesna care how he takes it

MINNIE The prints belong to both of us (*Hands them to LUTHER*)

You haven't said if you like them yet

LUTHER (*taking them, suddenly rams them in the fire*) Tha can
go to hell

MINNIE (*with a cry*) Ah!—that's my ninety pounds gone (*Tries
to snatch them out*)

MRS GASCOIGNE (*beginning to cry*) Come, Joe, let's go, let's go,
my lad I've seen as much this day as ever my eyes want to see
Let's go, my lad (*Gets up, beginning to tie on her bonnet*)

MINNIE (*white and intense, to LUTHER*) Should you like to throw
my ring after them? It's all I've got left (*She holds out her
hand—he flings it from him*)

LUTHER Yl, what do I care what I do! (*Clenching his fists as if
he would strike her*)—what do I!—what do I——!

MRS GASCOIGNE (*putting on her shawl*) A day's work—a day's
work! Ninety pound! Nay—nay, oh, nay—nay, oh, nay—nay!

Let's go, Joe, my lad Eh, our Luther, our Luther! Let's go, Joe
Come

JOE Ah, I'll come, Mother

MRS GASCOIGNE Luther!

LUTHER What?

MRS GASCOIGNE It's a day's work, it is, wi' thee Eh dear! Come,
let's go, Joe Let's go whoam

LUTHER An' I'll go

MRS GASCOIGNE Dunna thee do nowt as ter'll repent of, Luther—
dunna thee It's thy mother axes thee Come, Joe

MRS GASCOIGNE *goes out, followed by JOE* LUTHER *stands
with face averted from his wife, mutters something, reaches
for his cap, goes out* MINNIE *stands with her hand on the
mantelpiece*

ACT IV

The following morning—about 5 a m A candle is burning

MINNIE sits by the fire in a dressing-gown She is weeping A knock, and MRS GASCOIGNE'S voice MINNIE goes to open the door, re-enters with her mother-in-law, the latter with a big brown shawl over her head

MRS GASCOIGNE Is Luther a-whoam?

MINNIE No—he's not been in all night

MRS GASCOIGNE T-t-t-t! Now whereiver can they be? Joe's not in neither

MINNIE Isn't he?

MRS GASCOIGNE No He said he might be late, so I went to bed, and slept a bit uneasy-like till about four o'clock Then I wakes up a' of a sudden, an' says "I'm by mysen i' th' house!" It gave me such a turn I daresn't shout So I gets me up an' goes ter his room, an' he'd niver bin i' bed a' night Well, I went down, but no signs nowhere An' 'im wi' a broken arm An' I listened an' I listened—an' then methinks I heered a gun go off I felt as if I should die if I stopped by mysen another minute So I on's wi' my shawl an' nips down here There's not a soul astir nowhere I a'most dropped when I seed your light Hasn't Luther bin in a' night, dost say?

MINNIE He went out with you, and he never came in again I went to bed, thinking perhaps he'd be sleeping on the sofa And then I came down, and he wasn't here

MRS GASCOIGNE Well, I've seen nowt of him, for he never come up to our house—Now I wonder what's afoot wi' th' silly fools?

MINNIE I thought he'd gone and left me

MRS GASCOIGNE It's more like some o' this strike work When I heered that gun, I said "Theer gqes one o' my lads!"

MINNIE You don't think they're killed?

MRS GASCOIGNE Heaven knows what they are But I niver thought he'd ha' served me this trick—left me by myself without telling me, and gone cutting off a' th' night through—an' him wi' a broken arm

MINNIE Where do you think they've gone?

MRS GASCOIGNE The Lord above alone knows—but I'se warrant it's one o' these riotin' tricks—stopping them blacklegs as wor goin' down to see to th' roads

MINNIE Do you think——?

MRS GASCOIGNE I'll back anything For I heered th' winding engines plain as anything Hark!

They listen

MINNIE I believe I can hear them

MRS GASCOIGNE Th' ingines?

MINNIE Yes

MRS GASCOIGNE They're winding something down Eh dear, what a dead world it seems, wi' none o' th' pits chuffin' an' no steam wavin' by day, an' no lights shinin' by night You may back your life there was a gang of 'em going to stop that lot of blacklegs And there'd be soldiers for a certainty If I didn't hear a shot, I heered summat much like one

MINNIE But they'd never shoot, would they?

MRS GASCOIGNE Haven't they shot men up an' down th' country? Didn't I know them lads was pining to go an' be shot at? I did Methinks when I heard that gun, "They'd niver rest till this had happened"

MINNIE But they're not shot, Mother You exaggerate

MRS GASCOIGNE I niver said they wor But if anything happens to a man, my lass, you may back your life, nine cases out o' ten, it's a spit on th' women

MINNIE Oh, what a thing to say! Why, there are accidents

MRS GASCOIGNE Yes, an' men verily gets accidents, to pay us out, I do believe They get huffed up, they bend down their faces, and they say to theirselves "Now I'll get myself hurt, an' she'll be sorry," else "Now I'll get myself killed, an' she'll ha'e nobody to sleep wi' 'er, an' nobody to nag at," Oh, my lass, I've had a husband an' six sons Children they are, these men, but, my word, they're revengeful children Children men is a' the days o' their lives But they're master of us women when their dander's up, an' they pay us back double an' treble—they do—an' you mun allers expect it

MINNIE But if they went to stop the blacklegs, they wouldn't be doing it to spite us

MRS GASCOIGNE Wouldn't they! Y1, but they would My lads 'ud do it to spite me, an' our Luther 'ud do it to spite thee Yes—and it's trew For they'd run theirselves into danger and lick their lips for joy, thinking, if I'm killed, then *she* maun lay me out Y1—I seed it in our mester He got killed a' pit An' when I laid him out, his face wor that grim, an' his body that stiff, an' it said as plain as plain "Nowthen, you've done for me " For it's risky work, handlin' men, my lass, an' niver thee pray for sons—Not but what daughters is any good Th' world is made o' men, for me, lass—there's only the men for me An' tha'rt similar An' so, tha'lt reap trouble by the peck, an' sorrow by the bushel For when a woman builds her life on men, either husbands or sons, she builds on summat as sooner or later brings the house down crash on her head—y1, she does

MINNIE But it depends how and what she builds.

MRS GASCOIGNE It depends, it depends An' tha thinks tha can steer clear o' what I've done An' perhaps tha can But steer clear the whole length o' th' road, tha canna, an' tha'lt see Nay, a childt is a troublesome pleasure to a woman, but a man's a trouble pure and simple

MINNIE I'm sure it depends what you make of him

MRS GASCOIGNE Maybe—maybe But I've allers tried to do my best, i' spite o' what tha said against me this afternoon

'MINNIE I didn't mean it—I was in a rage

MRS GASCOIGNE Y1, tha meant it plain enow But I've tried an' tried my best for my lads, I have—an' this is what owd age brings me—wi' 'em

MINNIE Nay, Mother—nay See how fond they are of you

MRS GASCOIGNE Y1—an' they go now i' their mischief, yes, tryin' to get killed, to spite me Y1'

MINNIE Nay Nay

MRS GASCOIGNE It's true An' tha can ha'e Luther Tha'lt get him, an' tha can ha'e him

MINNIE Do you think I shall?

MRS GASCOIGNE I can see Tha'lt get him—but tha'lt get sorrow wi' 'em, an' wi' th' sons tha has See if tha doesna

MINNIE But I don't care Only don't keep him from me It leaves me so—with nothing—not even trouble

MRS HOLROYD (*contralto*) Come along!

MINNIE I'm frightened, mam

MRS HOLROYD Frightened, what of?

MINNIE Oo, there was a row

MRS HOLROYD (*taking MINNIE in her arms*) Did they frighten you, my pet? (*She kisses her*)

JACK (*in a high whisper*) Mother, it's pink bonnet and blue bonnet, what was dancing

MINNIE (*whimpering*) I don't want to go to bed, mam, I'm frightened

CLARA (*who has pulled off her pink bonnet and revealed a jug-handle coiffure*) We're going now, duckie—you're not frightened of us, are you?

MRS HOLROYD *takes the girl away before she can answer* JACK lingers behind

HOLROYD Now then, get off after your mother

JACK (*taking no notice of his father*) I say, what's a dog's-nose?

CLARA *ups with her handkerchief and LAURA responds with a faint giggle*

HOLROYD Go thy ways upstairs

CLARA It's only a small whiskey with a spoonful of beer in it, my duck

JACK Oh!

CLARA Come here, my duck, come on

JACK *curious, advances*

CLARA You'll tell your mother we didn't mean no harm, won't you?

JACK (*touching her earrings*) What are they made of?

CLARA They're only earrings Don't you like them?

JACK Um! (*He stands surveying her curiously Then he touches a bracelet made of many little mosaic brooches*) This is pretty, isn't it?

CLARA (*pleased*) Do you like it?

She takes it off Suddenly MRS HOLROYD is heard calling, 'Jack, Jack' CLARA starts

HOLROYD Now then, get off!

CLARA (*as JACK is reluctantly going*) Kiss me good night, duckie, and give this to your sister, shall you?

She hands JACK the mosaic bracelet He takes it doubtfully She kisses him HOLROYD watches in silence

MRS GASCOIGNE He'll come to thee—an' he'll think no more o' me as is his mother than he will o' that poker

MINNIE Oh, no—oh, no

MRS GASCOIGNE Y1—I know well—an' then that other

There is a silence—the two women listening

MINNIE If they'd been hurt, we should ha' known by now

MRS GASCOIGNE Happen we should If they come, they'll come together An' they'll come to this house first

A silence MINNIE starts

Did ter hear owt?

MINNIE Somebody got over the stile

MRS GASCOIGNE (*listening*) Y1

MINNIE (*listening*) It is somebody

MRS GASCOIGNE I' t'street

MINNIE (*starting up*) Yes

MRS GASCOIGNE Comin'?' It's Luther (*Goes to the door*) An' it's on'y Luther

Both women stand, the mother nearer the door The door opens—a slight sluther Enter LUTHER, with blood on his face—rather shaky and dishevelled

My boy! my boy!

LUTHER Mother! (*He goes blindly*) Where's Minnie?

MINNIE (*with a cry*) Oh!

MRS GASCOIGNE Wheer's Joe?—wheer's our Joe?

LUTHER (*to MINNIE, queer, stunned, almost polite*) It worn't 'cause I wor mad wi' thee I didna come whoam

MRS GASCOIGNE (*clutching him sternly*) Where's Joe?

LUTHER He's gone up street—he thought tha might ha' wakkened

MRS GASCOIGNE Wakkened enow

MRS GASCOIGNE goes out

MINNIE Oh, what have you done?

LUTHER We'd promised not to tell nobody—else I should We stopped them blacklegs—leastways—but it worn't because I—I— (*He stops to think*) I wor mad wi' thee, as I didna come whoam

MINNIE What have you done to your head?

LUTHER It wor a stone or summat catched it It's gev me a headache Tha mun—tha mun tie a rag round it—if ter will (*He sways as he takes his cap off*)

She catches him in her arms He leans on her as if he were tipsy

Minnie——

MINNIE My love—my love!

LUTHER Minnie—I want thee ter ma'e what tha can o' me (*He sounds almost sleepy*)

MINNIE (*crying*) My love—my love!

LUTHER I know what tha says is true

MINNIE No, my love—it isn't—it isn't

LUTHER But if ter'lt ma'e what ter can o' me—an' then if ter has a childt—tha'lt happen ha'e enow

MINNIE No—no—it's you It's you I want It's you

LUTHER But tha's allers had me

MINNIE No, never—and it hurt so

LUTHER I thowt tha despised me

MINNIE Ah—my love!

LUTHER Dunna say I'm mean, to me—an' got no go

MINNIE I only said it because you wouldn't let me love you

LUTHER Tha didna love me

MINNIE Ha'—it was you

LUTHER Y! (*He looses himself and sits down heavily*) I'll ta'e my boots off (*He bends forward*)

MINNIE Let me do them (*He sits up again*)

LUTHER It's started bleedin' I'll do 'em i' ha'ef a minute

MINNIE No—trust me—trust yourself to me Let me have you now for my own (*She begins to undo his boots*)

LUTHER Dost want me?

MINNIE (*she kisses his hands*) Oh, my love! (*She takes him in her arms*)

He suddenly begins to cry

CURTAIN

The Fight for Barbara

A COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS

(1912)

CHARACTERS

FRANCESCA

WESSON

BARBARA

DR. FREDERIC TRESSIDER

LADY CHARLCOTE

Scene A Villa in Italy

ACT I

8 30 in the morning The kitchen of an Italian villa—a big open fireplace of stone, with a little charcoal grate—fornello—on either side—cupboards, table, rush-bottom chairs with high backs—many bright copper pans of all sizes hanging up
The door-bell rings in the kitchen—rings hard—after a minute a door is heard to bang

Enter WESSON, in dressing-gown and pyjamas a young man of about twenty-six, with thick hair ruffled from sleep He crosses and goes through door R Sounds of voices Re-enter WESSON, followed by Italian maid-servant, FRANCESCA, young, fair, pretty—wears a black lace scarf over her head She carries a saucepan full of milk On the table stand a soup-tureen and an enamel jug

FRANCESCA Questa? (Puts her hand on the jug)

WESSON No, in the other (She pours the milk into the tureen)

FRANCESCA (smiling) Abondante misura!

WESSON What's that? Come?

FRANCESCA Abondante misura latte!

WESSON Oh—full measure Sì!—running over!

FRANCESCA Ranning ova (Both laugh)

WESSON Right you are—you're learning English

FRANCESCA Come?

WESSON Vous apprenez anglais—voi—inglese!

FRANCESCA O—non—mente inglese!

WESSON Nothing English? Oh yes! Er—fa tempo cattivo!

FRANCESCA Tempo cattivo—sì

WESSON Rotten weather—

FRANCESCA Come?

WESSON It's all the same (She puts the lid on her saucepan and turns away) Er—what day is it?—er—giorno che giorno?

FRANCESCA Oggi? Domenica

WESSON Domenica!—dimanche—Sonntag—Sunday

FRANCESCA Come?

WESSON Sunday!

FRANCESCA Sendy!

WESSON That's it (*Both laugh—she blushes and turns away—bows*)

FRANCESCA *Buon giorno, Signore*

WESSON *Buon giorno*

Exit FRANCESCA R He drinks some milk, wipes his mouth and begins to whistle "Put me among the girls!"—takes some branches of olive and ilex from a box near the fire—puts them in the fireplace As he is so doing, enter Left—BARBARA—age about twenty-six—fair—rather a fine young woman, holding her blue silk dressing-gown about her She stands in the doorway L, holding up her finger

BARBARA Yes, you may well whistle that! I heard you, Giacometti

WESSON (*turning round*) And did it fetch you out of bed?

BARBARA Yes, it did I heard your dulcet tones

WESSON They were no dulcetter than usual

BARBARA And, pray, what right had they to be as dulcet!—(*draws herself up*)—to a little servant-maid, indeed!

WESSON She's awfully nice, and quite a lady

BARBARA Yes—yes—I know you! She's pretty, is she?

WESSON Awfully pretty! (*Lighting the heap of branches in the fire*) These matches are the stinking devil

BARBARA Aren't they! I tried to light a cigarette with them, and I thought I should have died!

WESSON You should have waited till the sulphur had burned away (*laughing*) And the pretty maid had got a mantilla on this morning

BARBARA Ah! I suppose the poor thing had been to church

WESSON It took my breath away when I opened the door, and I said "Oh!"

BARBARA *Giacomo!*

WESSON Do call me Jimmy—I hate to be Italianized!—and she blushed like fury

BARBARA Poor thing! Really, Giacometti, really, you are impossible

WESSON What for?

BARBARA Fancy saying "Oh!" to the young maid! Remember, you're a gentleman in her eyes

WESSON And what's wrong with saying "Oh!" when she's got a

fascinating mantilla on? I can't say delicate things in Italian—and—"Oh!"—who can't say "Oh!"—after all, what is there in it?

BARBARA What could have been more expressive! Think of the poor thing, how embarrassed she must feel

The fire blazes up in the big chimney

Oh, how beautiful! Now that makes me *perfectly* happy How *gorgeous*! How adorable! No, but, Wesson, I don't like it

WESSON What's that, the fire?

BARBARA No, the little servant-maid And you made her feel so uncomfortable

WESSON I didn't

BARBARA You must have done! Think—to her, at any rate, you're a gentleman

WESSON A thundering lot of a gentleman, when she finds me lighting the fire and grinding the coffee——

BARBARA Yes, but no doubt she thinks that's an eccentricity

WESSON There's a lot of eccentricity about living on a hundred-and-twenty a year, the pair of us

BARBARA And you must remember how fearfully poor these Italians are——

WESSON It's enough for me how fearfully poor we are ourselves—you in your silk dressing-gown! It'll be some time before you get such a one out of our purse

BARBARA Well, it doesn't matter—you *are* a gentleman here Look, this flat is quite grand

WESSON It will be when you have to clean it

BARBARA I don't mind cleaning it, don't be horrid! This adorable fire! But you won't do it, will you?

WESSON What?

BARBARA Say "Oh!" to the little maid It's not nice, really

WESSON Well, you see, it popped out when I saw the mantilla I s'll be used to it another time

BARBARA And you won't say it?

WESSON I won't say "Oh!", oh dear, oh no, never no more, I won't
(*Sings*)

BARBARA (*kissing him*) Dear!

WESSON (*kissing her*) What d'yer want?

BARBARA I love you

WESSON So you ought

LAURA (*suddenly, pathetically*) Aren't you going to give me a kiss, an' all?

JACK *yields her his cheek, then goes*

CLARA (*to HOLROYD*) Aren't they nice children?

HOLROYD Ay

CLARA (*briskly*) Oh, dear, you're very short, all of a sudden. Don't answer if it hurts you.

LAURA My, isn't he different?

HOLROYD (*laughing forcedly*) I'm no different.

CLARA Yes, you are. You shouldn't 'ave brought us if you was going to turn funny over it.

HOLROYD I'm not funny.

CLARA No, you're not. (*She begins to laugh. LAURA joins in in spite of herself.*) You're about as solemn as a roast potato. (*She flings up her hands, claps them down on her knees, and sways up and down as she laughs, LAURA joining in, hand on breast.*) Are you ready to be mashed? (*She goes off again—then suddenly wipes the laughter off her mouth and is solemn.*) But look 'ere, this'll never do. Now I'm going to be quiet. (*She prims herself.*)

HOLROYD Tha'd 'appen better.

CLARA Oh, indeed! You think I've got to pull a mug to look decent? You'd have to pull a big un, at that rate.

She bubbles off, uncontrollably—shaking herself in exasperation meanwhile. LAURA joins in. HOLROYD leans over close to her.

HOLROYD Tha's got plenty o' fizz in thee, seemly.

CLARA (*putting her hand on his face and pushing it aside, but leaving her hand over his cheek and mouth like a caress*) Don't, you've been drinking. (*She begins to laugh.*)

HOLROYD Should we be goin' then?

CLARA Where do you want to take us?

HOLROYD Oh—you please yourself o' that! Come on wi' me.

CLARA (*sitting up prim*) Oh, indeed!

HOLROYD (*catching hold of her*) Come on, let's be movin'—(*he glances apprehensively at the stairs*)

CLARA What's your hurry?

HOLROYD (*persuasively*) Yi, come on wi' thee.

CLARA I don't think. (*She goes off, uncontrollably.*)

BARBARA Why ought I?

WESSON (*at the fire*) There you are, you see, that's how to set a fornello going

BARBARA (*teasing*) Oh—oh, is it? And now you're going to make coffee l'Italienne, aren't you? Oh, you wonderful person!

WESSON I am

Gets the coffee-mill from cupboard—grinds coffee on the table, singing

Johnny used to grind the coffee-mill,
Mix the sugar with the sand,
But he got run in and all through mixing
His master's money with his own

BARBARA What is that beautiful and classic song?

WESSON *sings it again*

BARBARA (*laughing*) Oh, you common, common brat! Anybody could tell your father was a coal-miner

WESSON A booty collier—and I wish yours had been ditto—you'd ha' been more use Think of me, Lord of Creation, getting the breakfast ready (*She takes his head between her hands, and ruffles his hair*) While you stand messing about

BARBARA Oh, your lovely hair!—it makes waves just like the Apollo Belvedere

WESSON And come again to-morrer

BARBARA Don't—don't laugh at yourself—or at me when I say it's nice hair It is, Giacomo, it's really beautiful

WESSON I know, it's the Apollo Belvedere, and my beautiful nose is Antinous, and my lovely chin is Endymion—clear out

BARBARA You are horrid to yourself! Why won't you let me say you're nice?

WESSON Because the water's boiling

BARBARA You're not a bit nice

WESSON Mind!—my water's boiling! (*Breaks away—making coffee in a brass jug*) If this was Pimlico or Bloomsbury, and this was a London kitchen, you wouldn't love me, would you?

BARBARA If you could do anything so horrid as to stifle me in a poor part of London, I would *not* love you—I would hate you for ever Think of me!

WESSON But because we come careering to Italy, and the pans are of copper and brass, you adore me, don't you?

BARBARA Yes—on the whole

WESSON That is, for the first month or two We've been here six weeks

BARBARA Think of it—Giacomo mio, it seems like six minutes—it frightens me

WESSON (*hesitating*) It doesn't seem three months since we left England, does it?

BARBARA I can't believe we're here yet Giacomo, Giacomo, why is it so new, 'every day? Giacomo, why is it always more? It's always more, isn't it?

WESSON (*putting his arms round her*) You're a Judy! (*Kisses her*)

BARBARA Do you love me?

WESSON Not a bit

BARBARA Not a teenty bit?

WESSON Not a seroddy atom (*Laughs—tightens her in his arms—kisses her*)

BARBARA You're a *common* thing!

WESSON Am I no gentleman, as Frederick said?

BARBARA No, no one could ever accuse you of being a gentleman

WESSON Am I a lout?

BARBARA Oh—*did* it call him a lout!

WESSON Am I a clodhopper?

BARBARA Now—that makes me happy! That Frederick should call you a clodhopper—no, that is too much joy!

WESSON Have they called me any more names?

BARBARA You forget the clumsy clown—

WESSON That your papa would have kicked downstairs—think of the poor old winded baronet—

BARBARA Who's had his Selma all his life! And then says you're a degraded scoundrel for running away with me

WESSON Yes—his rotten old cheek

BARBARA He's a failure, too, you know—Papa's a failure! Why are all people failures?

WESSON Couldn't say

BARBARA It's because their women have been so rotten to them
Mama treated my father badly, she did, just because of his Selma

WESSON You'd let me have a Selma, wouldn't you?

BARBARA What! I'd show you—I'll show you if you try any of

your little games on me But poor Papa—everything he has done has gone wrong—his money—he had no son——

WESSON So there'll be no fifth baronet—how sad—what an awful loss to society!

BARBARA And here am I, his favourite daughter, have run away with the son of a coal-miner, from my good and loving husband

WESSON The right worthy Frederick Tressider, doctor of medicine Gentleman of means Worth a dozen of me

BARBARA Oh, how I hated his wooden face!

WESSON Well, you knocked spots off it pretty roughly

BARBARA How common, how inexpressibly common your language
is

WESSON There goes the milk (*Dashes to the fire*) Are you going to have bregger in the kitchen, or in the bedroom?

BARBARA We'll have it here for once Should we—because of this lovely fire—put some more sticks on

WESSON Put 'em on yourself—or, wait a minute—want eggs, or don't you?

BARBARA Yes, let's have eggs

WESSON You're a lazy little devil

BARBARA Think—think how I worked yesterday!

WESSON Yes—it nearly killed you, didn't it!

Silence for a moment

BARBARA Poor Frederick He *does* love me! If I'd seen it before I'd left him—I don't think I could have done it Why did he always hide it from me?

WESSON He didn't You merely never saw it

BARBARA Oh, but it never came out!

WESSON What did you *want* him to do! He loved you right enough, you merely didn't love him—and there it stands

BARBARA But—I knew he was in love with me—but—why could I never *feel* his love? Why could I never feel it *warm* me?

WESSON Because you never wanted to You were non-conductive to this particular form of love, that's all

BARBARA Think, I was married to him for three years, and I was no nearer to him than I am to that fornello

WESSON Poor devil—it wasn't his fault

BARBARA Yes, I have treated him badly

WESSON You might have done worse by staying with him

BARBARA But think—how he adored me! Why did it never seem anything to me, his love? But think, Giacomo, how he must suffer—such a highly esteemed man, and so proud and sensitive—

WESSON And we'd only known each other three weeks

BARBARA Oh, Giacomo, it makes me tremble! Do you think we shall bring it off?

WESSON We shall—if we make up our minds to. But if you keep footling with the idea of Frederick, and your people, and duty—then we shan't

BARBARA But, Giacomo—they loved me so

WESSON So do I

BARBARA Yes, but they needed me more. And I belonged to them! And they say love wears off—and if it does!

WESSON You were saying only a minute since it was always more

BARBARA Giacomo, I'm frightened

WESSON What of?

BARBARA Of everything—and sometimes I wonder—don't be cross if I say it, will you?

WESSON Say what you like

BARBARA Sometimes I wonder—it seems horrid—I wonder if I can trust you

WESSON Why?

BARBARA You are so queer—and I am so all alone—and if you weren't good to me—

WESSON I think you needn't be mean—

BARBARA But look—you seem to want to take me away from everything and everybody. I feel as if you wanted to swallow me, and take my will away. You won't do it, will you, Giacomo?

WESSON You're fatter than I am—ask a cat not to swallow a camel

BARBARA But do you think Frederick will divorce me?

WESSON You'll have to insist on it

BARBARA No—I can't—it seems so cruel. I can't, dear. He's so cut up. You know, he says he can't publicly accuse me

WESSON If he'd hate you and have done with it, it would be easier. Or if he loved you, he would offer you divorce. But no, he messes about between one thing and another, and sentimentalizes

BARBARA But he *does* love me, Giacomo

WESSON And a fat lot of use it is to you But he sees you don't clearly want a divorce and so he hangs on Now he talks about your going to live with your mother, and repenting, then he'll have you back But you like to leave a loophole by which you could creep out and go back, don't you? Ah, you do

BARBARA No—no—don't say it—don't say it Only I'm frightened

WESSON You know your people have given out you've gone into a convent in France, for a little while, because you had got religious ideas or something like that And I know they think you'll come crawling back at last—and Frederick is waiting for you—he's waiting—and you like to have it so—you do

BARBARA (*putting her arms round his neck*) No, it's not true, Giacometti, it's not true I *do* love you, don't I?

WESSON You only don't want to belong to me

BARBARA But I do belong to you

WESSON You don't—you tamper with the idea of Frederick

BARBARA He'd never do to me what you want to do

WESSON What?

BARBARA Humble me, and make me nothing—and then swallow me And it's *wrong* It's *wrong* for you to want to swallow me I am myself—and you ought to leave me free

WESSON Well, so I do

BARBARA You don't All the time you're at me Oh, and I hate you so sometimes, Giacomo Now you're cross with me

WESSON I should think the eggs are done

BARBARA (*seating herself*) I'm hungry, Giacomo—are you?

WESSON No—it makes me sick, the way you're always bleeding my self-respect

BARBARA *I' I'* Why it's I who've given you your self-respect Think of the crumpled up, despairing, hating creature that came into Mrs Kelly's drawing-room—and now look at yourself

WESSON But you won't love me—you want to keep upper hand

BARBARA (*laughing with scorn*) There you are quite mistaken I want there to be *no* upper hand I only want both of us to be free to be ourselves—and you seem as if you *can't* have it—you want to bully me, you want to bully me inside

WESSON All right—eat your breakfast then

BARBARA And it makes me feel as if I want to run—I want to run from you

WESSON Back to Frederick

BARBARA Yes—poor Frederick—he, never made me feel like this
I was always a free woman with him

WESSON And mightily you regretted it

BARBARA No—no! Not that! Your idea of marriage is like the
old savages hit a woman on the head and run off with
her

WESSON Very well

The bell-rings noisily

There's the butcher

Goes out door R—voices—re-enter WESSON

What do you want?

BARBARA I don't know—what do we?

WESSON I!—

*✓ He turns round The butcher, a handsome young fellow of
about twenty, has followed him and stands in the doorway*

BARBARA Oh!—Buon giorno!

BUTCHER Buon giorno, signora

BARBARA Pieve?

BUTCHER Sì

BARBARA Ah!—e il lago—?

BUTCHER È burrascoso

BARBARA Ah—tempo cattivo per voi

The butcher laughs

WESSON What do you want?

BARBARA Er—ha vitello?

BUTCHER Sì—Sì—quanto?

BARBARA How much do we want?

WESSON Mezzo chilo

BARBARA Mezzo chilo

BUTCHER (*touching his hood*) Grazia—buon giorno

The door is heard to close

BARBARA Oh, I like him, I like him—you said he wasn't nice

WESSON He's not—look at the way he comes in

BARBARA I like it It's so decided, at any rate ✓ I hate English people
for the way they always hang fire

WESSON Do you?

BARBARA Yes! I like him as he stands there—he looks like a wild
young bull or something, peering out of his hood

WESSON And you flirt with him

BARBARA Wesson!

WESSON I know it's a great insult to say so But he is good-looking—and see the way you stretch out your arm, and show your throat

BARBARA But Wesson, how *can* you I simply spoke to him And when you think of yourself with the servant maid——

WESSON I only laugh—you sort of show yourself

BARBARA Well, really, this is too much!

WESSON True, whether or not And you're always doing it You always want men to think I don't *keep* you You write to your mother like that, you write to Frederick like that—always as if I didn't keep you, as if you were rather undecided, you would make up your mind to walk away from me in a little while, probably

BARBARA How *can* you be so false? It would serve you right if I *did* leave you

WESSON I know that, you've said it before

BARBARA Really—no one but a common man would say I flirted with that butcher——

WESSON Well, I *am* common—what's the odds? You've lived with me for three months

BARBARA That doesn't say I shall live with you for ever

WESSON You can go the minute you want to go

BARBARA Ha, could I! It's easy for you to talk You'd see, when it came to it, how you would let me go

WESSON I wouldn't try to stop you, if you really, really wanted to leave me But you've got to convince me of that first

BARBARA You think there's not another like you, don't you?

WESSON For you, there isn't

BARBARA I'm not so sure

WESSON I am! But try, only try Only try and make your mistake But it'll be too late, once you've done it

BARBARA Pooh! you needn't think you'll threaten me

WESSON I only tell you *Can* I give you anything?

BARBARA The honey

He rises and gets it from the cupboard

WESSON I wait on you, yet I want to bully you

BARBARA Yes, it's subtler than that

WESSON If you let me wait on you, you leave yourself in my hands

BARBARA Not a bit of it—not a bit of it! Do you think it makes any difference to me? Frederick would have waited on me on his knees

WESSON Then it's time somebody taught you you're not as great as you think You imagine you're the one and only phoenix

BARBARA (*laughing*) And I am, aren't I, Giacometti? Say I am

WESSON I say you're a pecky, scratchy one, at that rate

BARBARA No—no! Say I'm nice—say I'm ever so nice

WESSON On rare occasions

BARBARA Always—say always

WESSON It wouldn't be true

BARBARA Yes—yes, it would, Giacomo See, I'm ever so nice, aren't I? I'm ever so nice! Look at my nice arms, how they love you

WESSON Better than you do

BARBARA No—not better than I do Come and kiss them Come and give them a little kiss

WESSON (*going and kissing her arms*) You're cruel, if you're nothing else

BARBARA No, I'm not Say I'm not Kiss me!

WESSON, *laughing shakily, kisses her—A voice is heard outside* “*La posta*”

WESSON Oh, Lord, there's the postman—he's the serpent in my Eden

VOICE *La posta!*

WESSON *goes to the door, re-enters with letters*

WESSON (*tearing open an envelope*) The serpent's left his venom

BARBARA (*making a frightened face*) Is it Frederick?

WESSON And your mother

BARBARA Oh dear! Gia, I can't stand it

WESSON Why not?

BARBARA I can't stand it—I can't—poor Frederick If he was ill, Giacomo?

WESSON He'd have to get better

BARBARA He might die

WESSON He wouldn't be such a fool What's up in your letter?

BARBARA (*wiping her eyes*) It seems so cruel!

WESSON Your father's ill

BARBARA (*starting and snatching the letter from his hand*) Papa!
She reads, crying quietly WESSON sits waiting—he has read
Frederick's letter

BARBARA (*looking up*) Is he very ill, Giacomo?

WESSON No

BARBARA They'll say it's me

WESSON Let 'em It's the whisky, as a matter of fact

BARBARA Look how cruel mama is, "Your father is very ill, but he does not wish to see you while you continue your present mode of life The doctor says he is to be spared all strain and anxiety"

WESSON And they're thinking of going to Harrogate, so he's not at death's door

BARBARA And look at Frederick's letter—"Ever since you drove a spike into my brain, on February the 24th, I have been mad" Do you think he is mad, Giacomo?

WESSON A bit, perhaps—but so were you when you lived with him—going clean cracked

BARBARA He won't commit suicide, will he?

WESSON No—no more than I shall

BARBARA (*reading*) "There are some nights when I never sleep at all—I try to work, but my brain has gone" (*Shudders*)

WESSON It is vile—but I can't help it Think of the hell if you went back to him

BARBARA (*reading—laughs*) "Do not speak of Wesson I do not wish to hear of his existence, or to know that he exists Only, if ever he crosses my path, I will crush him like a beetle" How strong his feelings are!

WESSON His words, you mean

BARBARA No, he is passionate—you don't know And he can hate

WESSON He can sound like it

BARBARA But if he came here and killed you?

WESSON I should offer myself to the knife, of course I must practise being "daggerous" in readiness (*Puts a pointed kitchen knife between his teeth*) Sq!

BARBARA Oh, you are lovely! (*Laughs*) Let me kiss you (*He takes the knife from between his teeth—she kisses him*) Oh, the way he submits! Doesn't he like it, then?

WESSON He likes it all right—but he's sick of this tragedy

BARBARA Are you tired of me, Giacomo?

WESSON Tired of the mess we're in, that's all

BARBARA Do you want to be rid of me?

WESSON I want to be sure of you

BARBARA Well, and you are Do you think Frederick will ever let me go?

WESSON You must insist on his divorcing you

BARBARA But I daren't, Giacomo, I daren't

WESSON You'd rather remain as we are?

BARBARA No—no! Only he seems something so sure—you know—like when he said “You have dishonoured our marriage vow, but I never will”

WESSON That's as he pleases

BARBARA But it's rather fine

WESSON He *is* fine, in a thousand ways where I'm not But you never loved him

BARBARA No—I never loved him Poor Frederick, it doesn't seem fair, does it?

WESSON It does not You were rottenly unfair to him

BARBARA In what way?

WESSON Holding him cheap Holding his love for you lightly, when it was the biggest thing about him

BARBARA Why did it never seem so much to me, till I'd left him?

WESSON You hated him While he could keep you, he felt a man—but you didn't mean to be kept—you tortured him—you fought against him—you undermined him—you were killing him

BARBARA Oh no—oh no! I never hated him I did a lot for him

WESSON You, perhaps, had plenty of good-will towards him—but you tortured him like hell You, with your kindness, are one of the cruellest things going

BARBARA How *can* you say so, Giacomo! Am I cruel to you?

WESSON You are

BARBARA (*laughing*) It seems to me only funny when you say I'm cruel—I, who wouldn't hurt a fly

WESSON Then I wish I was a fly, and not a man

BARBARA Aw, did it be a man!—did it be a little man in trousers, then, did it?

WESSON It did!—I think they're getting a bit impatient, your people You'll see they'll combine forces just now to get you back

HOLROYD (*sitting on the table, just above her*) What's use o' sittin' 'ere?

CLARA I'm very comfy I thank thee

HOLROYD Tha'rt a baffling little 'ussy

CLARA (*running her hand along his thigh*) Aren't you havin' nothing, my dear? (*Offers him her glass*)

HOLROYD (*getting down from the table and putting his hand forcibly on her shoulder*) No Come on, let's shift

CLARA (*struggling*) Hands off!

She fetches him a sharp slap across the face MRS HOLROYD *is heard coming downstairs* CLARA, *released, sits down, smoothing herself* HOLROYD *looks evil* He goes out to the door

CLARA (*to MRS HOLROYD, penitently*) I don't know what you think of us, I'm sure

MRS HOLROYD I think nothing at all

CLARA (*bubbling*) So you fix your thoughts elsewhere, do you? (*Suddenly changing to seriousness*) No, but I *have* been awful to-night

MRS HOLROYD (*contralto, emphatic*) I don't want to know anything about you I shall be glad when you'll go

CLARA Turning-out time, Laura

LAURA (*turtling*) I'm sorry, I'm sure

CLARA Never mind But as true as I'm here, missis, I should never ha' come if I'd thought But I had a drop—it all started with your husband sayin' he wasn't a married man

LAURA (*laughing and wiping her eyes*) I've never knowed her to go off like it—it's after the time she's had

CLARA You know, my husband was a brute to me—an' I was in bed three month after he died He was a brute, he was This is the first time I've been out, it's a'most the first laugh I've had for a year

LAURA It's true, what she says We thought she'd go out of 'er mind She never spoke a word for a fortnight

CLARA Though he's only been dead for two months, he was a brute to me I was as nice a young girl as you could wish when I married him and went to the Fleece Inn—I was

LAURA Killed hisself drinking An' she's that excitable, she is We s'll 'ave an awful time with 'er to-morrow, I know

MRS HOLROYD (*coldly*) I don't know why I should hear all this

BARBARA Even if they did, I'd be gone again in three weeks

WESSON But if they got hold of the right handle, they'd get you back and keep you

BARBARA What handle?

WESSON Oh, I dunno Your pity, your self-sacrifice, your desire to be straight

BARBARA Self-sacrifice! There's a lot of self-sacrifice about me
(*Laughs*) They'd find I don't work well with *that* handle

WESSON You don't know yourself You keep them dangling

BARBARA Why do you hate me?

WESSON Go to hell

BARBARA (*plaintive*) Are you cross with me? But you *are*! (*very plaintive*) Why are you cross with me, Giacomo, when I love you?

WESSON You—you only love yourself

BARBARA No, Giacometti, no, I don't See how loving I am, really—see how unselfish I am——

WESSON So unselfish you'd rob Peter to pay Paul, then go back to Peter to console him

BARBARA You're horrid to me

WESSON And you are worse to me

BARBARA But I'm not

WESSON Hm

BARBARA (*mocking him*) "Hm!"—what common grunts! Kiss me
(*pleading*) Don't you want to kiss me?

WESSON No

BARBARA (*sadly*) Aw!

WESSON (*turning and taking her in his arms*) You're a baggage

BARBARA Do you want to kiss me? (*She draws back*)

WESSON Resigned, I kiss the rod

BARBARA And am I the rod? Oh, Giacomo, think of *me* as a rod

WESSON You see if Frederick and your mother aren't up to some little trick just now

BARBARA I'm frightened, Giacomo

WESSON Then you're frightened of yourself, of your own hesitating, half-and-half, neither-fish-flesh-fowl—nor—good-red-herring self

ACT II

Evening, several days after the first act The dining-room of the same villa—a rather large room, with piano, writing-desk and old furniture In the big bay window, which looks over a garden on to the lake, is a large couch BARBARA is lying on the couch WESSON, without his collar and tie, sits beside her

WESSON You've got a nice chin

BARBARA Frederick used to adore it

WESSON Then he'd no business to

BARBARA (*putting her arms round his neck*) Dear!

WESSON Don't you wish there'd never been any Frederick—or anybody else—

BARBARA Well, you haven't much room to talk, look what a mess your women had got you into

WESSON But don't you wish we could have come straight to each other, and been married simply, before we'd knocked about?

BARBARA I don't trust marriage

WESSON Because you were stupid and married wrong—that's not the fault of marriage

BARBARA No—but I don't trust it

WESSON Folk are such fools, they should marry the right people

BARBARA Even when the right people are *married*, they go wrong

WESSON No—I don't believe it—and I don't believe you love me—and whether you do or not, I *do* love you

BARBARA Because you've decided to

WESSON Yes, because I know I may hate you, I may rage against you, I may sneer at you—very well! It doesn't alter the fact that I love you

BARBARA It seems to me so queer, to make up your mind that you love anybody

WESSON You poke holes in me—well, I'll patch 'em up—I won't give in

BARBARA Oh—oh—the dear! He's on his nice little high horse, is he? Oh!—he should be on the roundabouts, on his wooden prancer!

WESSON Or on a round-about chicken

BARBARA And he looks so pathetic on his chicken—the dear
(Kisses him)

WESSON Will you stick to me, Barbara?

BARBARA Oh, did it want to be stuck to? It shall then—Oh, it's nice hair!

WESSON Till death do us part

BARBARA Aw, is it talking about death, is it—aw!

WESSON It's ten-past-six What train did your mother say—the five-to-six?

BARBARA (starting) No, half-past seven

WESSON The six train has just gone

BARBARA Are you frightened?

WESSON No—no—I'm not frightened Only we're rather raw, really, about the business It seems funny that we're a scandal

BARBARA Doesn't it!

WESSON I'll go and look if I can see anybody, shall I?

BARBARA Yes! Kiss me first (He kisses her)

Exit WESSON BARBARA sits up straightening her hair She is in Bavarian peasant dress, with bare arms and throat WESSON comes running in

WESSON I don't think it's she—but there is a woman—

BARBARA Good gracious—and look at us! (She flies out—her voice is heard, excited) yes—it's she Quick!

WESSON Well, I must get my collar on first

In a great flurry, he ties his tie, then runs out The stage is empty Then voices are heard

VOICE OF BARBARA Poor Mama!

They both laugh—there is silence The door-bell rings loudly

BARBARA rushes in and stands near the door WESSON is heard outside

VOICE OF WESSON Oh, hōw do you do! This is earlier than we thought

VOICE OF LADY CHARLCOTE How do you do, Mr Wesson?

✓ *Enter LADY CHARLCOTE—about sixty—white hair, shortish, stout, rather handsome—looks resentful—ugly dressed*

BARBARA Oh—Mama!

Runs forward, laughing shakily—does not kiss—takes her mother's hand—then stands embarrassed

LADY CHARLCOTE (*looking round*) Yes——

BARBARA Take your things off——

LADY CHARLCOTE But I mustn't stay—I mustn't stay (*Taking off her gloves—nervous*) I want to say to you, Mr Wesson, why don't you do something for Barbara?

WESSON (*astonished*) But I do

LADY CHARLCOTE But you don't A married woman, and you keep her here with you as she is It is wrong, quite wrong

WESSON But you don't know—you don't understand

LADY CHARLCOTE Yes, yes, I do understand It is you who don't understand What right have you to do it? Barbara has a husband in England, a good honest gentleman, who is going mad because of her She is here, but she can go back

BARBARA But, Mama, what I do, I do of myself (*She is crocheting nervously*)

LADY CHARLCOTE Yes (*Turning to WESSON*) You have not got even enough money to keep her She has to have money from her sister, from her friends She is the daughter of a high-born and highly cultured gentleman

BARBARA But if I choose to do it, Mama, it is my own affair

LADY CHARLCOTE No, it isn't Think of your father—think of Frederick (*Turning to WESSON*) And do you expect to build up happiness on the ruins of this life? You cannot Think of your future You can do nothing with my daughter You can't put her in her own station, you can't even give her an honest name Is she to live with you, and take money from her husband and her friends?

WESSON She needn't take any money from anybody

LADY CHARLCOTE And you say you will live here You try it for six months, Mr Wesson, and you will wish yourself dead, you will find it so dull And Barbara is to be the servant, and she is to have no friends, no, not a friend in the world, but is to live buried here among these common Italians Another man's wedding ring and engagement ring on her finger at this minute The very bills of her last dresses left for her husband to pay

BARBARA But, Mama, I'm not a horse that is to be kept You don't consider me

LADY CHARLCOTE Yes, it is you I consider How can any man say he loves you, when he brings you into this shame Where will you live?

WESSON But if there were a divorce

LADY CHARLCOTE (*to him*) You think only of yourself Think of her father He is getting old now Where will he go, that he can hold his head up It is a shame that will kill him 't will kill everybody (*Beginning to cry—looking in her handbag for a hanky*) We are old, and hoped to live at last in peace Haven't we had trouble enough in our lives? And how can I sleep at night, thinking of my daughter, and what is to become of her Her father does not want to see her again (*Cries*) There is no rest, and no peace Her husband comes, and it nearly kills me to see the state he is in A woman—what is to become of her, what is to become of her And you keep her here

WESSON No—I don't keep her

LADY CHARLCOTE Yes, you keep her here—the daughter of a highly cultured gentleman, as your mistress It is impossible And her husband is so good He will have her back in spite of all, and everything can be hushed up——

BARBARA I don't want things to be hushed up What I do I want to be done openly——

LADY CHARLCOTE Don't be a fool—you can't live on ideas

WESSON No—I don't want people to talk——

LADY CHARLCOTE But they will talk Sir William and I have come out here because they've started—and his heart so bad! We expect to be considered by our children, but they turn on us It's not natural that we should have all this trouble now, when we're not expecting it Everything begins to look comfortable, and Barbara so well settled, when this happens As her mother, as a woman older than yourself, I've got to tell you it's wrong, absolutely wrong, and can only end in sorrow You will see in a few years' time where you will be It is my duty to warn you And you must let Barbara go back with me

WESSON *shakes his head*—BARBARA *crochets nervously—there is silence*

BARBARA Has Papa come with you, then?

LADY CHARLCOTE Yes—we're staying a month with Laura in Gardone

WESSON (*rising*) Let me give you something to eat

LADY CHARLCOTE No—no—I must be going at once I must be going It's such a long way to the station

WESSON Excuse me

Exit WESSON

BARBARA (*quietly*) How does Frederick look?

LADY CHARLCOTE Oh, poor fellow! If you saw him, you could never do it

BARBARA (*bending her head over her work*) Is he ill?

LADY CHARLCOTE Ill!—poor fellow! He is three parts mad! And he loves you, Barbara, he loves you! How can you throw away the love of a man like that?

BARBARA Does he really want *me*, or does he want his reputation—or rather mine

LADY CHARLCOTE Poor fellow—such a position to leave him in And has he ever been anything but good to you? You have had everything you wanted—

BARBARA I haven't He *has* been good to me—I wish he hadn't, it would have been easier He has been good to me, and he's given me everything he could But I haven't had what I wanted, no, and he couldn't give it me

LADY CHARLCOTE And do you mean that this man can?

BARBARA crochets in silence—they wait for each other

BARBARA Will it kill him?

LADY CHARLCOTE I tell him, at this rate he won't live long

Enter WESSON with a tray, wine, biscuits, bread and butter

WESSON Will you have a glass of wine—it's "vin de pays", but it's—at any rate, it's all right for me, though I'm no connoisseur

LADY CHARLCOTE No, thank you

WESSON Could I make you a cup of tea?

LADY CHARLCOTE Oh no, thank you very much

BARBARA Is Papa in Gardone?

LADY CHARLCOTE In Brescia—but he doesn't want to see you Oh, thank you—But he expects you to come back in a proper state of mind—I think it's all you can do, to make the best of it now This is impossible (*Neither of them answers*) And we are staying at the Monte Baldo You will write to me, Barbara

BARBARA Yes Good-bye, Mama (*They shake hands*)

LADY CHARLCOTE Good-bye (*To WESSON*) Oh, don't you trouble to come out

WESSON I think it is no good for Barbara to go back to Frederick It would only be misery for them both They can't—

Exit talking BARBARA remains alone Her hands fall in her lap, and she broods There is sound of a carriage—re-enter WESSON—he flings his cap on the table When BARBARA hears him coming she picks up her crocheting When he enters she looks up with a laugh

BARBARA Poor Mama—always full of commonsense She was always a good one at showing the sensible side of the affair But didn't it seem common to you—like any of the women of the common people you've told me about?

WESSON Just Only it's natural At any rate she wasn't lofty

BARBARA Oh no—Mama would never have been that She would have said just the same to a Grand Duke

WESSON She wouldn't—look at the money business You *don't* need any of their money—we *can* live on what I earn

BARBARA And I don't mind making your bed I wouldn't do it for any man—no, I wouldn't But I don't mind

WESSON If I can't give you much money, well, I give you everything I've got

BARBARA Yes, it was mean of her, bringing that up—it's like kicking a man when he's down

WESSON But I suppose anybody would do it She doesn't seem superior, that's one thing But I hate them! Why can't they leave us alone! What do I care what the old Mrs Baronet says

BARBARA (*laughing*) You looked as if you didn't care—the way you sat in that chair (*Imitates him, half crouching*)

WESSON Well—that coming all at once—

BARBARA When we'd been so happy—yes, it was a bit overwhelming!

WESSON I thought the heavens had opened and the last day come

BARBARA You looked it—the way you sat crumpled up in that chair (*Laughs*)

WESSON What could I do?

BARBARA (*laughing*) You looked so frightened, so crumpled up! I expected you every minute to wither away into nothing (*Laughs*)

uncontrollably) I thought there'd be nothing left of you (*interrupted by her laughter*) You—you seemed to get less and less—till—(*helpless with laughter*) I thought you'd be gone (*laughing*) I was frightened—I wanted to get hold of your coat-tails (*laugh*) to keep you

WESSON Well, what could I do?

BARBARA I thought you were going to creep under that desk (*Shaking and helpless with laughter, she points to the hole under the writing desk, by which he sits*) I thought you were going to crawl inside like a dog into a kennel (*helpless laughter*) and pop your head out, and look sideways at her, and say "Yap—yap" in a little, frightened voice—then rush inside

WESSON Well—if she'd been a man, I might have shouted—but what else could I do?

BARBARA You looked so crumpled up, with your little tail between your legs (*Laughs*) You *did* want to get into that corner (*Laughs helplessly—then rises*) Mind, let me show you (*Laughing, she almost falls to the floor, then creeps inside the space under the desk—pokes out her head—falls face forward on the floor with laughter—lifts up her face, peering sideways*) Yap—yapyap! Yap!—the little dog! (*She shrieks with laughter—he giggles from time to time—she rises again*)

WESSON No—I wasn't as bad as that

BARBARA (*shrieking*) You were, you were! I thought I should have died And every minute I had visions of you collapsing under the desk and barking at Mama (*Laughing*) Poor Mama, what would she have done if you had?

WESSON I wish I had

BARBARA I wish you had, I wish you had! (*Drying her eyes*) But no, you sat there getting less and less You can go so little, like a dying pig

WESSON Well, you were impressed, you know you were

BARBARA I wasn't—I wanted to scream Why didn't you suddenly get up and flap your arms like a cockerel and crow?

WESSON But what good would it have done?

BARBARA It would have been so beautiful Or you might have got astride on a chair and gone riding round the room, shouting

WESSON I might have done a lot of things

What a pity! (*Beginning to laugh again*) You looked anything but a hero that time

WESSON I didn't feel a hero And if I'd crowed like a cock I shouldn't have looked a hero

BARBARA Mama little thought what havoc she'd work in our little ménage (*Laughing*) But why do you take it so seriously?

WESSON I don't take it seriously, but I reckon it's rather rotten of her We thought she was coming friendly, to help What will you eat?

BARBARA I don't mind a bit

WESSON (*drinking wine*) Drink?

BARBARA Thank you (*She drinks a little*)

WESSON I told her the only thing possible was a divorce

BARBARA You know what a muddler she is She blows with every wind

WESSON I don't care how she blows, so long as we can get that divorce

BARBARA If she goes and gets Frederick's back up now, God knows when you'll get it, I tell you

WESSON I don't care—they can all go to hell! But until you stand up in front of me and say, "I want definitely to go back to Frederick—you're no good to me", I shall tell them to go to blazes

BARBARA It looks as if you'll tell them a lot Poor little dog, is his tail coming up again? Come here and be kissed

WESSON I don't want to be kissed Will you eat now?

BARBARA Just as you like

WESSON A tray is ready

Goes out—returns immediately with the supper tray

BARBARA Poor Frederick—it does twist my inside to think about him

WESSON And a lot of good may it do you

BARBARA Do you think he really might go mad?

WESSON Not unless he's weak-minded to start with

BARBARA Well, he isn't—his mind is stronger than yours, if it came to it

WESSON (*rather ashamed*) I know he's not—and he won't go mad

BARBARA But he loves me so (*Plaintively*)

WESSON He should have more sense, then, for you don't love him

BARBARA But I do, Giacomo

WESSON Very well, you *do*, then ,

BARBARA And I can't bear him to suffer

WESSON You made him suffer worse underneath, twisting your spear in his secret wound, before you left him, than you do now that it's open He can doctor an open wound A secret one drives him mad

BARBARA But I didn't torture him I was a joy to him And think of it, Giacomo, I was the only joy he'd ever had in his life

WESSON And the only sorrow

BARBARA Why do you want to say horrid things about me?

WESSON I don't

BARBARA But you do! Look, you say I tortured Frederick

WESSON So you did So you torture me

BARBARA But how?—tell me *how*, Giacomo

WESSON You needn't laugh at me when I'm feeling a fool

BARBARA You hate me, Giacomo

WESSON Does it please you?

BARBARA Why should it please me? Why *should* it please me, Giacomo?

WESSON It appears to You seem to exult

BARBARA I exult because you wither away when Mama scolds you! I assure you I don't exult in your heroic appearance *then*

WESSON I don't ask you to

BARBARA What does he want then—does he want me to fall at his feet and worship him, does he then? (*She does so—goes on her knees at his feet, puts her forehead to the ground—raises it up and down—in a consoling, mocking voice*) La—di—da—di—da!—did it want to be worshipped?

WESSON (*seizing her by the arm*) Get up, you lunatic

BARBARA But don't you like to be worshipped?

WESSON (*gripping her arm*) Get up

She rises slowly—he grips both her arms

You love! You love only yourself!

BARBARA (*putting her tongue out at him*) Tra—la—la—la!

WESSON Yes

BARBARA Tra—la—la—la! (*He remains holding her—she says, almost pleading*) Let me go

WESSON I won't

CLARA I know I must 'ave seemed awful An' them children—aren't they nice little things, Laura?

LAURA They are that

HOLROYD (*entering from the door*) Hanna you about done thee?

CLARA My word, if this is the way you treat a lady when she comes to see you (*She rises*)

HOLROYD I'll see you down th' line

CLARA You're not coming a stride with us

LAURA We've got no hat, neither of us

CLARA We've got our own hair on our heads, at any rate (*Drawing herself up suddenly in front of MRS HOLROYD*) An' I've been educated at a boarding school as good as anybody I can behave myself either in the drawing-room or in the kitchen as is fitting and proper But if you'd buried a husband like mine, you wouldn't feel you'd much left to be proud of—an' you might go off occasionally

MRS HOLROYD I don't want to hear you

CLARA (*bobbing a curtsy*) Sorry I spoke

She goes out stiffly, followed by LAURA

HOLROYD (*going forward*) You mun mind th' points down th' line

CLARA'S VOICE I thank thee, Charlie—mind thy own points

He hesitates at the door—returns and sits down There is silence in the room HOLROYD sits with his chin in his hand

MRS HOLROYD listens The footsteps and voices of the two women die out Then she closes the door HOLROYD begins to unlace his boots

HOLROYD (*ashamed yet defiant, withal anxious to apologize*) Wheer's my slippers?

MRS HOLROYD sits on the sofa with face averted and does not answer

HOLROYD Dost hear? (*He pulls off his boots, noisily, and begins to hunt under the sofa*) I canna find the things (*No answer*) Humph!—then I'll do be 'out 'em (*He stumps about in his stockinged feet, going into the scullery, he brings out the loaf of bread, he returns into the scullery*) Wheer's th' cheese? (*No answer—suddenly*) God blast it! (*He hobbles into the kitchen*) I've trod on that broken basin, an' cut my foot open (*MRS HOLROYD refuses to take any notice He sits down and looks at his sole—pulls off his stocking and looks again*) It's lamed me for life (*MRS*

BARBARA I'll make you

WESSON Try!

BARBARA I will!

WESSON Try! (*A moment of silence*)

BARBARA (*subduedly*) You hurt my arms

WESSON (*through his teeth*) And why shouldn't I?

BARBARA Don't be horrid

WESSON *puts his arms round her, fastens her close*

WESSON Oh, you're not faithful to me!

His voice is like a cry He reaches forward, his mouth to her throat

BARBARA (*thickly*) I am

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE I

Morning, the next day BARBARA in walking-out dress, WESSON in an old jacket

BARBARA What time did the man say Mama would be here?

WESSON I understood she would come for you in a carriage at ten o'clock

BARBARA And did she really say you mustn't come?

WESSON She said she wished to drive alone with you

BARBARA Put your coat on and come, too

WESSON No—perhaps she wants to talk to you, and to have you to herself a bit It's natural You needn't do anything that you don't want to do

BARBARA Why *should* she ask me for a drive without you? It's like her impudence—I won't go!

WESSON Yes, you'd better

BARBARA You'd say I'd better do any miserable thing they liked to ask me

WESSON Alright

BARBARA Why don't you say I *oughtn't* to go for a drive with Mama without you?

WESSON Because I don't care—your mother can use all her persuasions and reasons till she's sick of it

BARBARA But why should she?

WESSON It's probably the shortest way, if we stick to ourselves all through

BARBARA A fine lot of sticking to yourself you do, don't you? Think of the shrivelling creature, whom Mama scolded yesterday

WESSON I was true to myself, then—and to you

BARBARA Were you—were you! Then I'll have another kind of fidelity, thank you

BARBARA Go!

WESSON For your drive You'll find Lady Charlcote before you get to the Piazza

BARBARA And if I don't choose to?

WESSON (*shrugging*) You'll please yourself

BARBARA Tra—la-la—la!

WESSON I wish you'd go

BARBARA Why do you wish I'd go? I will, then

Exit—the door is heard to bang WESSON *watches her*

WESSON There goes the carriage, and the old lady I should like to murder the twopence-ha'penny lot of them, with their grizzling and whining and chuffing If they'd leave us alone we should be alright—damn them! Miserable bits of shouters! My mother was worth a million of 'em, for they've none of 'em the backbone of a flea—She doesn't want to stick to me—she doesn't want to love me—she won't let herself love me She wants to save some rotten rag of independence—she's afraid to let herself go and to belong to me

He goes to the sideboard, drinks wine, looks at a book, throws it down, plays a dozen chords on the piano, gets up, drinks more wine, sits down to write, and remains perfectly still, as if transfixed—all the time he has moved quietly—the door-bell rings—he does not hear—it rings louder—he starts up and goes to the door—is heard saying, "How do you do? Will you come in?" Enter SIR WILLIAM CHARLCOTE—short, stout, a gentleman—grey bristling moustache

WESSON Will you sit down?

SIR WILLIAM (*taking a seat near the door*) Thank you

WESSON (*offering cigarettes in a threepenny packet*) Excuse the packet

SIR WILLIAM Thank you, I have some of my own

WESSON *throws the packet on the table and sits on the couch*

WESSON It's a nice day

SIR WILLIAM Yes (*Clearing his throat*) I called to hear from yourself an account of what you intend to do

WESSON (*knitting his fingers*) I intend to do nothing but what I am doing

SIR WILLIAM And what is that?

WESSON Living here—working

SIR WILLIAM And keeping my daughter under the present conditions?

WESSON Barbara stays as long as she will I am here for her while she wants me

SIR WILLIAM But you have no right to be here for her to want

WESSON But I say, while ever she wants me, I am here for her

SIR WILLIAM Don't you see that is cowardly and base

WESSON Is it the morality of it you want to discuss?

SIR WILLIAM Yes—yes—it is the *right* of it You may perhaps think I have no room to talk That is like your damned impudence

WESSON But that's not the point

✓ SIR WILLIAM A man has a right to any woman whom he can get, so long as she's not a married woman Go with all the unmarried women you like But touch a married woman, and you are a scoundrel

WESSON So!

SIR WILLIAM It destroys the whole family system, and strikes at the whole of society A man who does it is as much a criminal as a thief, a burglar, or even a murderer You see my point?

WESSON Your point of view

SIR WILLIAM You see so much Then you see what you are doing a criminal act against the State, against the rights of man altogether, against Dr Tressider, and against my daughter

WESSON So!

SIR WILLIAM And seeing *that*, only an—only a criminal by conviction can continue in what he is doing—a fellow who deserves to be locked up

WESSON If life went according to deserts

SIR WILLIAM If you intend to behave in the least like a man, you will clear out of this place——

WESSON I've got the house on a six months' lease

SIR WILLIAM I will pay the lease

WESSON It is paid—but I like the place, and prefer to stay

SIR WILLIAM That is, you will continue to keep my daughter in—in—in this shame and scandal——

WESSON She chooses to stay

✓ SIR WILLIAM If plain reasoning will not convince you, we must try other methods

WESSON Very well

SIR WILLIAM You—whom I thought to be doing a service by asking you to my house——

The bell rings

WESSON (*rising*) Excuse me a moment

Exit—voices—enter BARBARA, followed by LADY CHARLCOTE and WESSON

BARBARA Papa!

SIR WILLIAM I came to speak with this man

BARBARA But why behind my back?

SIR WILLIAM I will come when I like I will not have women, and especially women like you, about me when I have anything to say

BARBARA Nor more will I have men like you interfering with my affairs behind my back, Papa!

LADY CHARLCOTE For shame, Barbara

BARBARA (*turning, flashing*) What right has he to come bullying Wesson behind my back I came away with him—it was I who suggested he should come to Italy with me when I was coming to see Laura So when you have anything to say, Papa, say it to me—if you dare

SIR WILLIAM Dare! Dare!

BARBARA Whom are you talking to, Papa—and you of all people! I did not love Frederick, and I won't live with him—so there—and you may go

SIR WILLIAM (*picking up his hat*) I never want to see you again

LADY CHARLCOTE Barbara, you should respect your father

BARBARA Mama—you—you—then let him respect me, and the man I live with

Exit SIR WILLIAM

LADY CHARLCOTE What has he said?

WESSON It does not matter

LADY CHARLCOTE Well—now you must make the best of your own affairs—for you've cut off all your own people from you, Barbara

BARBARA I have *not* cut myself off—it's you who have left me in the lurch I was miserable with Frederick I felt I couldn't stand it You would have helped me to have had lovers, Mama But because I come away decently and openly you all turn on me

LADY CHARLCOTE You know it is impossible

BARBARA Very well, I will be impossible!

LADY CHARLCOTE I shall never leave you in the lurch (*Crying*)
You are my daughter, whatever happens

Exit—WESSON hurries to the door after her—it is heard to close—he returns

BARBARA Why do you let them trample on you? Why do you play the poor worm? It drives me mad!

WESSON But you don't want me to insult your father

BARBARA But why do you let yourself be bullied and treated like dirt?

WESSON I don't

BARBARA You do—you do—and I hate you for it

WESSON Very well (*She sits down on the couch, twisting her handkerchief. He seats himself beside her and takes her hand*) Never mind, they'll get over it

BARBARA Papa won't—and I have loved him so

WESSON He will

BARBARA He won't! Oh, but I hate him—a mean funkier! But he always was a funkier. He had his Selma on the sly, and when Mama found him out—it positively broke him. What did he say to you?

WESSON He explained his point of view, which seems to me perfectly logical

BARBARA And I suppose you agreed with him?

WESSON No, I didn't agree with him—only I understood

BARBARA And you cringed to him, I know you did

WESSON I don't think so

BARBARA And now they've left me

WESSON Never mind—they can slam at us, but we can stand it

BARBARA But it's so horrible—and I have to fight for you, as if you weren't a man

WESSON I don't think you have any need

BARBARA Yes, but I have—and all the burden falls on me—you don't take your share

WESSON Surely I do! Never mind, I know it's horrid for you. But you will stick to me, won't you?

BARBARA I didn't think it would be so hard—I have to fight you, and them, and everybody. Not a soul in the world gives me the tiniest bit of help

WESSON That's only because you feel rotten I love you, Barbara

BARBARA Doesn't it make you hate me, all this horridness?

WESSON Why should it? I don't care what comes, so that we get a little closer

BARBARA But it's worth it, isn't it, Giacomo?—say I'm worth it

WESSON (*putting his arms round her and kissing her*) You're the
only thing in life and in the world that I've got—you are

BARBARA Are you sure?

WESSON I've got my work, which isn't life Then there's nothing else but you—not a thing—and if you leave me—well, I've done

BARBARA How do you mean, done?

WESSON Only my effort at life I shall feel as if I had made my big effort—put all my money down—and lost The only thing remaining would be to go on and make the best of it

BARBARA I suppose that's how Frederick feels

WESSON I suppose it is—if only he would get a grip on and try to make the best of it

BARBARA But it's not so easy

WESSON No, it isn't, poor devil But if he's got to do it, he may as well

BARBARA Oh, do you love me enough, Giacomo?

WESSON I love you enough for whatever you want me for

BARBARA Sure?

WESSON Sure! The question is, do you love *me* enough?

BARBARA I love you better than you love me

WESSON Take your hat off, I can't kiss you

BARBARA (*obediently removing her hat*) Mama told me Papa was coming—I was furious, it seemed such a mean dodge They *are* mean, though, and sordid Did he say horrid things to you?

WESSON He said he'd thrash me

BARBARA (*laughing*) Fancy little Papa!

WESSON Are you miserable? Are you sorry you're done out of your drive?

BARBARA No, I'm thankful to be back with you If *only* they left us in peace, we could ~~be~~ be so happy

WESSON They seem to grudge it us, don't they?

BARBARA Yes! And Mama says perhaps Frederick's coming

WESSON At any rate we s'll have had 'em all, then

BARBARA But I couldn't bear to see him, Giacomo!

WESSON Then don't see him

BARBARA But he might do something mad

WESSON Let him

BARBARA No—I couldn't bear it I couldn't bear it if anything happened to him

WESSON Why *should* anything happen to him?

BARBARA And what would he do if he saw me? Would he go quite mad?

WESSON You're not such a magical person as all that

BARBARA But you don't know him

WESSON Quite sufficiently

BARBARA Isn't it funny—when I was first engaged to him, and was reading Othello, I thought what a good Othello he'd make, better than the real one

WESSON You feel sure he'll slay you, poor Desdemona

BARBARA (*laughing*) Yes—he's so Othelloish

WESSON And you so Desdemonical, aren't you?

BARBARA (*laughing*) What does that mean?

WESSON It means you sit sighing by a sycamore tree, you poor soul

BARBARA (*kissing him*) O, I love you!

WESSON Do you?

CURTAIN

SCENE II

Evening of the same day, WESSON sits alone, writing Enter BARBARA, resplendent in an evening dress, with ornament in her hair She stands in the doorway, looking across at herself in a mirror

BARBARA You've never seen me in this before (*He looks up—puts his pen between his teeth—she preens herself*)

WESSON (*after a moment*) I hate it

BARBARA (*hurt*) But why?—I look nice Don't I look nice?

WESSON I hate it—I hate it—you belong to those others in it

BARBARA But how nasty of you, Giacometti! It's only the dress—the woman is just the same

WESSON She's not She's according to her frock, which is Frederick's You put it on for Frederick, not for me

BARBARA I didn't I want you to see how grand I can look Don't you really think I look nice?

WESSON No—I'd rather see you in your kitchen pinafore

BARBARA See how you want to drag me down But you've got an evening suit (*Laughing*) Does it really hurt you? (*Sits down and begins to play a dance on the piano—it is the "Blue Danube"—she breaks off*) It's the dearest dress I ever had

WESSON Take it off, Barbara

BARBARA (*slowing down—she is very quiet*) Yes

Rises—exit slowly He sits chewing his pen—in a moment she rushes back, lays her hands on his shoulder

BARBARA There's Frederick!

WESSON Rubbish!—Where?

BARBARA At the gate—with Mama—I saw them from the bedroom window

LADY CHARLCOTE'S voice is heard calling "Barbara!"

BARBARA Quick! I'll call to them from the window I'm coming—I will—(*Moves to the window*)

WESSON What's the good? Let them go away again

BARBARA I'll call now——

WESSON Damn!

He moves grudgingly to the door BARBARA stands with her hands clasped over her bare breast, terrified—listening The gate is heard to bang open—voices—enter FREDERICK, alone—a haggard, handsome man of forty, brown moustache, dark brown eyes, greying at the temples He hesitates at the door

FREDERICK (*ironically*) May I come in?

BARBARA (*frightened*) What do you want?

FREDERICK Merely permission to speak to you

BARBARA You know you may speak to me

They hesitate—enter WESSON, followed by LADY CHARLCOTE

WESSON Barbara, do you want me to go with Lady Charlcote to the Hotel Cervo for half an hour?

BARBARA I don't know (*Sinks on to the couch*)

WESSON You must tell me to go

DR TRESSIDER looks at him sideways and shows his teeth, but does not speak—BARBARA watches the two men in terror

BARBARA Perhaps you'd better go—Mama can stay with me

LADY CHARLCOTE I think Frederick has the right to speak to you alone, Barbara

BARBARA (*almost whispering*) But why

FREDERICK Are you afraid that I may abduct you?

LADY CHARLCOTE No, Frederick, I don't think it is fair to leave her alone with you

FREDERICK (*nastily*) Don't you? Perhaps it isn't safe——

LADY CHARLCOTE You might not be responsible for what you did

FREDERICK So the only place for me is the lunatic asylum

BARBARA If you are like that, Frederick, I don't know what you can want to speak to me at all for

FREDERICK It is a question for surprise

BARBARA I'd much rather you *did* treat me as dirt, and left me alone

WESSON Will you sit down, Lady Charlcote?

FREDERICK (*to WESSON*) Will you please take yourself away, while I speak to my wife?

BARBARA Yes, go, Wesson

LADY CHARLCOTE I would go for a few minutes, Mr Wesson It can't do you any harm Things will settle themselves then

WESSON (*to BARBARA*) Must I?

BARBARA Only to the—to one of the other rooms

WESSON I'll go to the bedroom, then

Exit sullenly

FREDERICK (*taking a seat*) I'm glad you look so well, Barbara

LADY CHARLCOTE You won't do any good that way, Frederick

FREDERICK (*turning slowly to her*) Perhaps you'll tell me what to say!

LADY CHARLCOTE You needn't behave like a fool, at any rate

BARBARA I'm afraid you've been ill, Frederick

FREDERICK Yes—I am ill! I am glad to see you are so well

BARBARA Don't, Frederick—what is the good of this—what is the good of it? Let us make the best we can now——

FREDERICK Exactly!

BARBARA Then the only sane thing would be to say what you came to say and let us get it over

FREDERICK I came for your instructions, of course

BARBARA It seems rather stupid, don't you think?

HOLROYD *glances at the wound*) Are 'na ter goin' ter get me owt for it?

MRS HOLROYD Psh!

HOLROYD Oh, a' right then (*He hops to the dresser, opens a drawer, and pulls out a white rag, he is about to tear it*)

MRS HOLROYD (*snatching it from him*) Don't tear that!

HOLROYD (*shouting*) Then what the deuce am I to do? (MRS HOLROYD *sits stonily*) Oh, a' right then! (*He hops back to his chair, sits down, and begins to pull on his stocking*) A' right then—a' right then (*In a fever of rage he begins pulling on his boots*) I'll go where I can find a bit o' rag

MRS HOLROYD Yes, that's what you want! All you want is an excuse to be off again—"a bit of rag"!

HOLROYD (*shouting*) An' what man'd want to stop in wi' a woman sittin' as fow as a jackass, an' canna get a word from 'er edge-ways

MRS HOLROYD Don't expect me to speak to you after to-night's show How dare you bring them to my house, how dare you?

HOLROYD They've non hurt your house, have they?

MRS HOLROYD I wonder you dare to cross the doorstep

HOLROYD I s'll do what the deuce I like They're as good as you are

MRS HOLROYD (*stands speechless, staring at him, then low*) Don't you come near me again—

HOLROYD (*suddenly shouting, to get his courage up*) She's as good as you are, every bit of it

MRS HOLROYD (*blazing*) Whatever I was and whatever I may be, don't you evci come near me again

HOLROYD What! I'll show thee What's the hurt to you if a woman comes to the house? They're women as good as yourself, every whit of it

MRS HOLROYD Say no more Go with them then, and don't come back

HOLROYD What! Y1, I will go, an' you s'll see What! You think you're something, since your uncle left you that money, an' Blackymore puttin' you up to it I can see your little game I'm not as daft as you imagine I'm no fool, I tell you

MRS HOLROYD No, you're not You're a drunken beast that's all you are

FREDERICK I've no doubt I always was stupid—a trusting fool——

BARBARA You know it wasn't like that Do you really wish to speak to me?

FREDERICK Yes, I think I can honestly say I do It, no doubt, surprises you

BARBARA Then for God's sake don't torture me any longer

FREDERICK It *would* be a pity! But what I have to say I have to say to my wife, not to the world at large, or even to my mother-in-law, or your paramour

BARBARA Perhaps you *had* better leave us alone, Mama

FREDERICK Hadn't you better consider again, Barbara? Wouldn't that be giving me too much encouragement? I might take a liberty I might even ask you to gallivant with me, like a seductive footman, or dustman (*There is silence*)

LADY CHARLCOTE I can go into another room (*Making signs to BARBARA*) Where can I go, Barbara?

BARBARA *rises—they go out together*—FREDERICK *looks round—gnaws the ends of his moustache* Re-enter BARBARA—*she leaves the door open—he glances, sees it, but makes no remark*

BARBARA (*taking her former seat*) Mama is in my bedroom

FREDERICK Anything to say to me?

BARBARA Don't be horrid with me, Frederick I *know* I deserve it——

FREDERICK I'll try not to be (*He sits devouring her with his eyes*)

You're in full-dress to-night, madam! Was it a great occasion?

BARBARA No—I put it on—it's the first time

FREDERICK You look the thing in it I turned up to see you on your mettle, by good luck

BARBARA Don't

FREDERICK Beautiful good luck War-paint, I suppose!

BARBARA You told me once you'd never be hard on a woman

FREDERICK I'm sorry if I'm hard on you—that *would* be unjust!

BARBARA Don't talk like that—Frederick

FREDERICK What shall *we* talk about—you or me?

BARBARA Tell me about yourself——

FREDERICK Ha!—how I suffered, you mean?

BARBARA I know it's been awful for you

FREDERICK Do you really—I shouldn't have thought it

BARBARA Oh, but I do! It's nearly driven me cracked sometimes

FREDERICK Ha! It was kind of you

BARBARA (*going forward impulsively and putting her hand on his knee*) Don't—

FREDERICK I won't—but tell me what—I must—

BARBARA Don't be like this—I can't bear it

FREDERICK You might tell me what you can bear

BARBARA Why can't you cast me off—why can't you find some other woman—there's Annabel, who adores you—or Lizzie Burroughs—

FREDERICK You think they'd make good successors to you?

BARBARA You might love them better than me—you might! See, I was not faithful to you

FREDERICK (*laughing*) I wouldn't rub it in, if I were you

BARBARA (*frightened*) But I'm not!

FREDERICK So you think I might do well to marry again?

BARBARA I thought—I can't bear—to think of you being lonely

FREDERICK And you'd give me a wedding present, I dare say, and give the woman advice how to fool me

BARBARA No—no—I won't let you say these things—

FREDERICK I dare say You were wasted on me, weren't you?

BARBARA You were good to me—but you never understood me—

FREDERICK I'm sorry! I understood you wanted a decent life, and I worked hard for you I understood you wanted some amusement—you did exactly as you liked—you had everything I had—and had your own way I was faithful to you from the day I saw you—and before that You might have called me a model husband I suppose that was my fault

BARBARA (*crying*) No—it wasn't your fault to be a good husband—that's why I love you still—in a way—you were so good to me—but—you weren't near to me—

FREDERICK I think I was as near as ever you'd let me come

BARBARA No—no—can't you remember—when we were first married—I thought marriage would be a jolly thing—I thought I could have lovely games with the man Can you remember, when I climbed to the top of the cupboard, in Lucerne? I thought you'd look for me, and laugh, and fetch me down No, you were terrified You daren't even come in the room You stood in the

door looking frightened to death And I climbed down And that's how it always was I had to climb down

FREDERICK And so you left me?

BARBARA Yes! I couldn't live with you

FREDERICK Because I didn't drag you by the ankle from the cupboard tops!

BARBARA Yes—that's it

FREDERICK And how long did it take you to find this out?

BARBARA You know very well that I was only introduced to Wesson about a month before—you knew all about it

FREDERICK And may I inquire after the predecessors of this clown?

BARBARA Yourself

FREDERICK I enjoy that honour alone, do I—with the miserable clown——

BARBARA You were not going to speak of him

FREDERICK And pray, when did you find out then that I had not—not found the real you

BARBARA The first night of our marriage—when I stood on that balcony and wanted to drown myself—and you were asleep

FREDERICK And afterwards—I suppose you forgot it?

BARBARA Sometimes You were good to me—and I didn't think then there *could* be anything else

FREDERICK Than what?

BARBARA Than going on as I was—as your wife

FREDERICK And you *never* loved me?

BARBARA Sometimes—when you were so nice to me——

FREDERICK Out of gratitude, as it were, and feeling you *ought* to love me

BARBARA I always felt I ought to love you

FREDERICK But could never bring it off Ha!—thank you for the try, at any rate

BARBARA And of course sometimes I hated you

FREDERICK Naturally

BARBARA And now it's over

FREDERICK As you say—it's over

There is a long silence

FREDERICK (*in a sudden outburst*) Woman, do you know I've given my life to you? Do you know, everything I did, everything I

thought, everywhere I went, was for you? I have worked till I reeled, I was so tired I have been your slave——

BARBARA That's it—I didn't want you to be my slave——

FREDERICK I—I—I have done everything How often have I asked you, "What do you want of me?" Why didn't you tell me then? Why didn't you say? Why have you deceived me all this while, letting me think you loved me?

BARBARA I didn't deceive you, (*crying*) I didn't know myself

FREDERICK How many times have you had your arms round my neck, and said, "Do you love me?"—I might well answer, "Malheureusement" What was that but deceit——

BARBARA It wasn't lying to you, Frederick—you *did* love me, and I wanted you to love me——

FREDERICK What right had you to want me to love you, when you cared not a couple of straws about me?

BARBARA I *did* want you to love me—you were all I had——

FREDERICK Until another came along, and then you threw my love away like a piece of dirty paper wrapping

BARBARA No—no—I didn't!

FREDERICK What else have you done? You have thrown me away like a bit of paper off a parcel You got all the goods out of the packet, and threw me away—I gave you everything, my life, everything, and it is not worth the stump of a cigarette, when it comes to—I tell you, this is the end of me I could work then, but now my brain has gone

BARBARA No, Frederick, no—you will work again

FREDERICK I tell you I can no more work now than you can row a boat when you have lost the oars I am done for—as a man you see me here a ruin Some nights I sleep, some nights I never close my eyes I force myself to keep sane But in the end my brain will go—and then I shall make an end——

BARBARA (*going over to him, kneeling with her hand on his knee, crying*) No—no, Frederick—no—no!

FREDERICK Then I shall go to Wood Norton—do you remember, where I saw you first—a girl of eighteen with a sash? I shall go to that pine wood where the little grove of larches is, and I shall make an end

BARBARA (*her head on his knee—weeping*) Oh, what can I do—what can I do?

FREDERICK I've no doubt it all sounds very melodramatic—but it's the truth for me. Then your work will be finished. I have loved you. I would have spilt my blood on every paving stone in Bromley for you, if you had wanted me to——

✓ BARBARA But I didn't want you to I wanted you to come near to me and make me yours and you be mine But you went on worshipping me instead of loving me—kissing my feet instead of helping me You put me on a pedestal, and I was miserable

FREDERICK And you never loved me all the time!

BARBARA I did love you—I did love you!

FREDERICK (*his fists clenched—shuddering*) I could strangle you!

BARBARA (*terrified*) Don't—don't—I shall scream! (*She gets up afraid and draws back. He gets hold of one of her arms.*)

FREDERICK You devil—you devil—you devil! But you belong to me, do you hear?—you belong to me!

BARBARA (*pushing him away*) Don't—don't—let me go—I shall call Mama—oh—

He releases her—she flings herself face down on the sofa—

he sits crouching, glaring Silence for some time

FREDERICK Well, have you been there long enough?

BARBARA (*sitting up*) Yes—long enough to know that it never was any good, and it never would be any good

FREDERICK "It never was any good, and never would be any good"
—what?

BARBARA You and me

FREDERICK You and me! Do you mean to tell me that my life has been a lie and a falsity?

BARBARA Why?

FREDERICK *You were my life—you—and you say it was never any good between us*

BARBARA But you had your work. Think, if you had to choose between me and your work.

FREDERICK You might as well ask an apple-tree to choose between enjoying the sunshine and growing its own apples—the one depends on the other and is the result of the other.

BARBARA No, Frederick Why, look how happy you could be with your work when I was miserable

FREDERICK But you had no reason to be. I gave you everything you asked for. What did you want?

BARBARA I suppose I wanted something you could not give

FREDERICK (*glaring at her—after a silence, suddenly*) I had a good mind to murder you

BARBARA (*frightened*) Why?

FREDERICK I had a good mind to murder you as you sit there

BARBARA (*frightened*) See—see how you loved me!

FREDERICK How I loved you! Yes—you see! You see how I loved you, you callous devil! Haven't I loved you with every breath I've fetched—haven't I?

BARBARA But what was the good of loving me if you had all the fun out of it? It didn't seem anything to me because I didn't realize—I didn't know——

FREDERICK You didn't love me!

BARBARA No—well—you should have seen that I did. It doesn't do me any good, if a man *dies* for love of me, unless there is some answer in me, so that it lives in me

FREDERICK I ought to have killed myself rather than marry you

BARBARA But I couldn't help that, could I?

FREDERICK No, you could help nothing. You could only throw me away like waste-paper that had wrapped up a few years of your life

BARBARA I'm sorry, Frederick. I'll do what I can, I will, really

FREDERICK What will you do?

BARBARA Don't you trust me?

FREDERICK Trust you, yes! You can go on doing as you like with me

BARBARA There you are, you see, resigned. Resigned from the very start—resigned to lose. You are, and you always were

FREDERICK Very well, you little devil—it seems you were determined——

BARBARA What?

FREDERICK To destroy me

BARBARA (*going and putting her arms round his neck*) No—no, Frederick. I'd do an awful lot for you—I really would—I have loved you

FREDERICK What, for example?

BARBARA I'd help you with the people in Chislehurst—come and live for a time in the same house

FREDERICK (*holding her by the arms and looking in her eyes*) Will you give up this man and come back to me?

BARBARA Oh—what's the good of promising, Frederick—I might only break it again. Don't force me.

FREDERICK Will you try? Will you try *me* again for three months?

BARBARA Come and live with you again?

FREDERICK Yes.

BARBARA As your wife?

FREDERICK Yes.

BARBARA Altogether as your wife?

FREDERICK Yes—or even—at first.

BARBARA (*piteously*) I don't know, Frederick.

FREDERICK Will you think about it?

BARBARA But I don't know! What is the good of thinking about it? But I don't know, Frederick.

FREDERICK You can make up your mind.

BARBARA But I can't—I can't—it pulls both ways. I don't know, Frederick.

FREDERICK Will you know better to-morrow—will you come, then, and tell me—will you?

BARBARA But I shan't know any better to-morrow. It's now! And I can't tell. Don't make me decide, Frederick!

FREDERICK What?

BARBARA Which way. Don't make me decide! (*She goes and sits on the couch, hiding her face in a cushion*)

FREDERICK (*suddenly flings his arms on the table and sobs*) Oh, good God—I can't bear it!

BARBARA (*looks at him, goes and puts her hand on his shoulder*) Don't, Frederick—don't! I will make up my mind, I will!

FREDERICK (*his face muffled*) I can't stand it.

BARBARA No, dear (*He sobs—she touches his hair*) Don't! Don't! You shall—I will do—what I can.

FREDERICK (*his face still hidden*) It will kill me, Barbara.

BARBARA No, dear—no, it won't. I must think of something. I will tell you to-morrow. I will come and tell you—

FREDERICK (*his face still hidden*) What?

BARBARA I don't know, dear—but I will see—I will come. Look at me—look at me. (*He lifts his face*) Dear! (*He folds her in his*

arms—she puts her head back as he kisses her) There's Mama !

He listens—hears a sound, snatches his hat and dashes out—

BARBARA *turns to the piano—straightens her hair—stands waiting* Enter LADY CHARLCOTE

LADY CHARLCOTE Has Frederick gone?

BARBARA Yes

Enter WESSON

LADY CHARLCOTE What have you decided?

BARBARA I don't know

LADY CHARLCOTE That's no answer Have you decided nothing?

BARBARA No

LADY CHARLCOTE I hope he won't go and jump in the lake

BARBARA I said I'd see him to-morrow

LADY CHARLCOTE Then he won't be such a fool How did he behave?

BARBARA Oh, don't talk about it, Mama !

LADY CHARLCOTE And are you coming to the Monte Baldo to-morrow then?

BARBARA Yes

LADY CHARLCOTE What time?

BARBARA In the morning—about eleven

LADY CHARLCOTE And you'll bring him your answer then?

BARBARA Yes

LADY CHARLCOTE Well, you must decide for the best for yourself Only don't go and make a double mess of it, that's all

BARBARA How do you mean, a double mess?

LADY CHARLCOTE You'll have to stick to one or the other now, at any rate—so you'd better stick to the one you can live with, and not to the one you can do without—for if you get the wrong one, you might as well drown two people then instead of one

BARBARA I don't know—I shall know to-morrow, Mama Good night

LADY CHARLCOTE (*kissing her—crying*) Well—all you can do now is to make the bed for yourself Good night! Oh, don't trouble to come out, Mr Wesson, don't

WESSON follows her Exit both BARBARA sits down and begins to play a waltz on the piano Re-enter WESSON

WESSON Frederick wasn't far off—he hadn't drowned himself

BARBARA goes on playing

WESSON I don't particularly want to hear that piano, Barbara

BARBARA Don't you? (*Plays a few more bars, then stops*) What do you want?

WESSON So you are going to see him to-morrow

BARBARA I am

WESSON What for?

BARBARA (*hesitating*) To tell him I'll go back to him

She remains with her back to WESSON—he sits at the table

There is dead silence

WESSON Did you tell him that tonight?

BARBARA No

WESSON Why not?

BARBARA Because I didn't want to

WESSON Did you give him hopes of that answer?

BARBARA I don't know

WESSON You do! Tell me

BARBARA I say I don't know

WESSON Then you're lying I don't believe you intended to tell him that I believe you say it to make me wild

BARBARA I don't

WESSON Then go now

BARBARA I said I'd go to-morrow

WESSON If you're going back to Frederick in the morning, you're not going to spend a night under this roof—hear that?

BARBARA Why not? I've spent a good many nights under this roof—what does one more or less matter?

WESSON While you've been with me here I considered you as a woman who wanted to stick to me as a wife—and as anything else I *don't want you*

BARBARA Very much as a wife you considered me at first—you were as unsure of us as ever I was

WESSON That was at the very first

BARBARA Was it—was it?

WESSON Whether or not—that's what I say now

BARBARA "Whether or not!"—you *would* say that At any rate, Frederick wouldn't say "whether or not"

WESSON And you want to go back to him?

BARBARA All men are alike They don't care what a woman wants They try to get hold of what they want themselves, as if it were

a pipe As for the woman, she's not considered—and so—that's where you make your mistake, gentlemen

WESSON Want? What *do* you want?

BARBARA That's for you to find out

WESSON What you want is some of the conceit knocking out of you

BARBARA You do it, Mr Tuppeny-ha'penny

WESSON If Frederick hadn't been such a damn fool he'd have taken you down a peg or two Now, you think yourself so blighted high and mighty that nobody's good enough to dangle after you

BARBARA Only a little puppy-dog that barks at my skirts

WESSON Very well, then the little puppy-dog *will* bark Are you going to see Frederick in the morning?

BARBARA Yes

WESSON And are you going to tell him, then, that you're going back to him?

BARBARA I don't know

WESSON You must know then, because if you are, you're not going to stop the night in this house

BARBARA Pooh! What do I care about your house?

WESSON You know it was really you who wanted it, and whose it is

BARBARA As if *I* care for this house—I'd leave it any minute I'll leave it now

WESSON If you're going to go back to Frederick, *leave* it now I ask you to ,

BARBARA Oh, very well—that is soon done
She goes out quickly

CURTAIN

HOLROYD What, what—I'm what? I'll show you who's gaffer, though (*He threatens her*)

MRS HOLROYD (*between her teeth*) No, it's not going on If you won't go, I will

HOLROYD Go then, for you've always been too big for your shoes, in my house—

MRS HOLROYD Yes—I ought never to have looked at you Only you showed a fair face then

HOLROYD What! What! We'll see who's master i' this house I tell you, I'm goin' to put a stop to it (*He brings his fist down on the table with a bang*) It's going to stop (*He bangs the table again*) I've put up with it long enough Do you think I'm a dog in the house, an' not a man, do you—

MRS HOLROYD A dog would be better

HOLROYD Oh! Oh! Then we'll see We'll see who's the dog and who isna We're goin' to see (*He bangs the table*)

MRS HOLROYD Stop thumping that table! You've wakened those children once, you and your trollops

HOLROYD I shall do what the deuce I like!

MRS HOLROYD No more, you won't, no more I've stood this long enough Now I'm going As for you—you've got a red face where she slapped you Now go to her

HOLROYD What? What?

MRS HOLROYD For I'm sick of the sights and sounds of you

HOLROYD (*bitterly*) By God, an' I've known it a long time

MRS HOLROYD You have, and it's true

HOLROYD An' I know who it is th'rt hankerin' after

MRS HOLROYD I only want to be rid of you

HOLROYD I know it mighty well But I know him!

MRS HOLROYD *sinking down on the sofa, suddenly begins to sob half-hysterically* HOLROYD *watches her* As suddenly, she dries her eyes

MRS HOLROYD Do you think I care about what you say? (*Suddenly*) Oh, I've had enough I've tried, I've tried for years, for the children's sakes Now I've had enough of your shame and disgrace

HOLROYD Oh, indeed!

MRS HOLROYD (*her voice is dull and inflexible*) I've had enough Go out again after those trollops—leave me alone I've had

- Seizes him He grapples with her They struggle He forces her backward, flings her with a smash on to the couch*
- WESSON You shan't! (*Goes and locks the door—stands at a loss*)
- BARBARA (*recovering*) It's very heroic—but I go to-morrow, whether or not
- WESSON You'll pass the night in this room then (*He sits down—there is silence for some minutes—at last he looks up, speaks falteringly*) You don't want to leave me, do you, Barbara? (*No answer*) You don't want to? (*Silence*) Well, whether you think you do or not, I shall never believe you want to leave me, not really—so there! (*A silence*)
- BARBARA A woman couldn't want to leave such a wonder as you, you think
- WESSON You can't want to leave me
- BARBARA Why not?
- WESSON (*sulkily*) Because I don't believe you can (*There is a silence*)
- BARBARA (*with difficulty*) A sort of faith performance!
He looks at her steadily, rises, goes and sits beside her
- WESSON Barbican!
- BARBARA (*dropping her head on his shoulder with a cry*) It's so hard on him, Giacomo
- WESSON (*putting his arms round her*) Never mind, he'll suffer at first, then he'll get better
- BARBARA (*crying*) He won't
- WESSON He will—he shall—he shall! And you'll see he will He'll be alright in the end You were too big a mouthful for him to swallow, and he was choking
- BARBARA But I make him suffer so
- WESSON (*kissing and kissing her*) No—it's my fault You don't want to leave me, do you?
- BARBARA I don't know what to do
- WESSON Stay with me, Barbican, my darling, and we'll manage that he's alright
- BARBARA It's not fair when a man goes loving you so much when you don't love him—it makes you feel as if you'd have to go back to him
- WESSON You can't go back to him—it would be wrong His love isn't living for you

BARBARA It isn't, is it, Giacomo?

WESSON No—kiss me, Barbara, will you? (*She kisses him*) I love you, Barbara

BARBARA Do you really love me?

WESSON Malheureusement

BARBARA He says that

WESSON And I don't mean it I'm glad I love you, even if you torture me into hell

BARBARA But do you love me an awful lot?

WESSON More than enough

BARBARA Really?

WESSON Truly

BARBARA But if he dies, I shall torment the life out of you

WESSON You'll do that anyway

BARBARA (*looking up—taking his face between her hands*) Shall I?

—No!—Say no—say I am a joy to you

WESSON You are a living joy to me, you are—especially this evening

BARBARA (*laughs*) No—but am I really?

WESSON Yes

BARBARA Kiss me—kiss me—and love me—love me a fearful lot—love me a fearful lot

WESSON I do And to-morrow you'll just say to Frederick, "I can't come back—divorce me if you love me" You'll say it, won't you? (*kissing her*)

BARBARA Yes.

WESSON If it kills him—it won't kill him—but you'll say it?

BARBARA (*hiding her face*) Must I, Giacomo?

WESSON Yes

BARBARA Then I s'll have to—oh dear! But you'll love me—love me a lot (*She clings to him wildly*)

WESSON I do—and I will

BARBARA Love me a fearful lot!

Touch and Go

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

(1920)

CHARACTERS

GERALD BARLOW
MR BARLOW (his father)
OLIVER TURTON
JOB ARTHUR FREER
WILLIE HOUGHTON
ALFRED BREFFITT
WILLIAM (a butler)
CLERKS, MINERS, etc
ANABEL WRATH
MRS BARLOW
WINIFRED BARLOW
EVA (a maid)

ACT I

SCENE I *Market-place of a Midland mining village*

SCENE II *Winifred's studio at Lilley Close*

ACT II

Drawing-room at Lilley Close

ACT III

SCENE I *An old park*

SCENE II *Same as Act I Scene I*

ACT I

SCENE I

Sunday morning Market-place of a large mining village in the Midlands A man addressing a small gang of colliers from the foot of a stumpy memorial obelisk Church bells heard Churchgoers passing along the outer pavements

WILLIE HOUGHTON What's the matter with you folks, as I've told you before, and as I shall keep on telling you every now and again, though it doesn't make a bit of difference, is that you've got no idea of freedom whatsoever I've lived in this blessed place for fifty years, and I've never seen the spark of an idea, nor of any response to an idea, come out of a single one of you, all the time I don't know what it is with colliers—whether it's spending so much time in the bowels of the earth—but they never seem to be able to get their thoughts above their bellies If you've got plenty to eat and drink, and a bit over to keep the missis quiet, you're satisfied I never saw such a satisfied bloomin' lot in my life as you Barlow and Walsall's men are, really Of course you can growse as well as anybody, and you do growse But you don't do anything else You're stuck in a sort of mud of contentment, and you feel yourselves sinking, but you make no efforts to get out You bleat a bit, like sheep in a bog—but you like it, you know You like sinking in—you don't have to stand on your own feet then

I'll tell you what'll happen to you chaps I'll give you a little picture of what you'll be like in the future Barlow and Walsall's 'll make a number of compounds, such as they keep niggers in in South Africa, and there you'll be kept And every one of you'll have a little brass collar round his neck, with a number on it You won't have names any more And you'll go from the compound to the pit, and from the pit back again to the compound You won't be allowed to go outside the gates, except at week-ends They'll let you go home to your wives on Saturday nights,

hears you You know how sorry for you we feel, that you've always got to make your speeches twice—once to those above, and once to us here below I didn't mean the angels and the devils, but never mind Speak up, Job Arthur

JOB ARTHUR It's not everybody as has as much to say as you, Mr Houghton

WILLIE No, not in the open—that's a fact Some folks says a great deal more, in semi-private You were just going to explain to me, on behalf of the men, whom you so ably represent and so wisely lead, Job Arthur—we won't say by the nose—you were just going to tell me—on behalf of the men, of course, not of the masters—that you think of others, besides yourself Do you mind explaining *what* others?

JOB ARTHUR Everybody's used to your talk, Mr Houghton, and for that reason it doesn't make much impression What I meant to say, in plain words, was that we have to think of what's best for everybody, not only for ourselves

WILLIE Oh, I see What's best for everybody! I see! Well, for myself, I'm much obliged—there's nothing for us to do, gentlemen, but for all of us to bow acknowledgments to Mr Job Arthur Freer, who so kindly has *all* our interests at heart

JOB ARTHUR I don't profess to be a red-rag Socialist I don't pretend to think that if the Government had the pits it would be any better for us No What I mean is, that the pits are there, and every man on this place depends on them, one way or another They're the cow that gives the milk And what I mean is, how every man shall have a proper share of the milk, which is food and living I don't want to kill the cow and share up the meat It's like killing the goose that laid the golden egg I want to keep the cow healthy and strong And the cow is the pits, and we're the men that depend on the pits

WILLIE Who's the cat that's going to lick the cream?

JOB ARTHUR My position is this—and I state it before masters and men—that it's our business to strike such a balance between the interests of the men and the interests of the masters that the pits remain healthy, and everybody profits

WILLIE You're out for the millennium, I can see—with Mr Job Arthur Freer striking the balance We all see you, Job Arthur, one foot on either side of the fence, balancing the see-saw,

with masters at one end and men at the other You'll have to give one side a lot of pudding—But go back a bit, to where we were before the motor car took your breath away When you said, Job Arthur, that you think of others besides yourself, didn't you mean, as a matter of fact, the office men? Didn't you mean that the colliers, led—we won't mention noses—by you, were going to come out in sympathy with the office clerks, supposing they didn't get the rise in wages which they've asked for—the office clerks? Wasn't that it?

JOB ARTHUR There's been some talk among the men of standing by the office I don't know what they'll do But they'll do it of their own decision, whatever it is

WILLIE There's not a shadow of doubt about it, Job Arthur But it's a funny thing the decisions all have the same foxy smell about them, Job Arthur

OLIVER TURTON (*calling from the car*) What was the speech about, in the first place?

WILLIE I beg pardon?

OLIVER What was the address about, to begin with?

WILLIE Oh, the same old hat—Freedom But partly it's given to annoy the Unco Guid, as they pass to their Sabbath banquet of self-complacency

OLIVER What about Freedom?

WILLIE Very much as usual, I believe But you should have been here ten minutes sooner, before we began to read the lessons (*Laughs*)

ANABEL W (*moving forward, and holding out her hand*) You'd merely have been told what Freedom isn't and you know that already How are you, Oliver?

OLIVER Good God, Anabel!—are you part of the meeting? How long have you been back in England?

ANABEL Some months, now My family have moved here, you know

OLIVER Your family! Where have they moved from?—from the moon?

ANABEL No, only from Derby—How are you, Gerald?

GERALD *twists in his seat to give her his hand*

GERALD I saw you before

ANABEL Yes, I know you did

JOB ARTHUR *has disappeared* The men *disperse sheepishly into groups, to stand and sit on their heels by the walls and the causeway edge* WILLIE HOUGHTON *begins to talk to individuals*

OLIVER Won't you get in and drive on with us a little way?

ANABEL No, I was going to church

OLIVER Going to church! Is that a new habit?

ANABEL Not a habit But I've been twice since I saw you last

OLIVER I see And that's nearly two years ago It's an annual thing, like a birthday?

ANABEL No I'll go on, then

OLIVER You'll be late now

ANABEL Shall I? It doesn't matter

OLIVER We are going to see you again, aren't we?

ANABEL (*after a pause*) Yes, I hope so, Oliver

OLIVER How have you been these two years—well?—happy?

ANABEL No, neither How have you?

OLIVER Yes, fairly happy Have you been ill?

ANABEL Yes, in France I was very ill

OLIVER Your old neuritis?

ANABEL No My chest Pneumonia—oh, a complication

OLIVER How sickening! Who looked after you? Is it better?

ANABEL Yes, it's a great deal better

OLIVER And what are you doing in England—working?

ANABEL No, not much—I won't keep the car here good-bye

GERALD Oh, it's alright

OLIVER But, Anabel—we must fix a meeting I say, wait just a moment Could I call on your people? Go into town with me one day I don't know whether Gerald intends to see you—whether he intends to ask you to Lilley Close

GERALD I——

ANABEL He's no need I'm fixed up there already

GERALD What do you mean?

ANABEL I am at Lilley Close every day—or most days—to work with your sister Winifred in the studio

GERALD What?—why, how's that?

ANABEL Your father asked me My father was already giving her some lessons

GERALD And you're at our house every day?

ANABEL Most days

GERALD Well, I'm—well, I'll be—you managed it very sharp, didn't you? I've only been away a fortnight

ANABEL Your father asked me—he offered me twelve pounds a month—I wanted to do something

GERALD Oh yes, but you didn't hire yourself out at Lilley Close as a sort of upper servant just for twelve pounds a month

ANABEL You're wrong—you're wrong I'm not a sort of upper servant at all—not at all

GERALD Oh yes, you are, if you're paid twelve pounds a month—three pounds a week That's about what Father's sick-nurse gets, I believe You're a kind of upper servant, like a nurse You don't do it for twelve pounds a month You can make twelve pounds in a day, if you like to work at your little models I know you can sell your little statuette things as soon as you make them

ANABEL But I *can't* make them I *can't* make them I've lost the spirit—the *joie de vivre*—I don't know what, since I've been ill I tell you I've *got* to earn something

GERALD Nevertheless, you won't make me believe, Anabel, that you've come and buried yourself in the provinces—*such* provinces—just to earn Father's three pounds a week Why don't you admit it, that you came back to try and take up the old threads?

OLIVER Why not, Gerald? Don't you think we ought to take up the old threads?

GERALD I don't think we ought to be left without choice I don't think Anabel ought to come back and thrust herself on me—for that's what it amounts to, after all—when one remembers what's gone before

ANABEL I *don't* thrust myself on you at all I know I'm a fool, a fool, to come back But I wanted to I wanted to see you again Now I know I've presumed I've made myself *cheap* to you I wanted to—I wanted to And now I've done it, I won't come to Lilley Close again, nor anywhere where you are Tell your father I have gone to France again—it will be true

GERALD You play tricks on me—and on yourself You know you do You do it for the pure enjoyment of it You're making a scene here in this filthy market-place, just for the fun of it You like to see these accursed colliers standing eyeing you, and squatting on their heels You like to catch me out, here where I'm known,

where I've been the object of their eyes since I was born This is a great *coup de main* for you I knew it the moment I saw you here

OLIVER After all, we *are* making a scene in the market-place Get in, Anabel, and we'll settle the dispute more privately I'm glad you came back, anyhow I'm glad you came right down on us Get in, and let us run down to Whatmore

ANABEL No, Oliver I don't want to run down to Whatmore I wanted to see you—I wanted to see Gerald—and I've seen him—and I've heard him That will suffice me We'll make an end of the scene in the market-place (*She turns away*)

OLIVER I knew it wasn't ended I knew she would come back and tell us she'd come But she's done her bit—now she'll go again My God, what a fool of a world!—You go on, Gerald—I'll just go after her and see it out (*Calls*) One moment, Anabel

ANABEL (*calling*) Don't come, Oliver (*Turns*)

GERALD Anabel! (*Blows the horn of the motor car violently and agitatedly—she looks round—turns again as if frightened*) God damn the woman! (*Gets down from the car*) Drive home for me, Oliver

CURTAIN

SCENE II

WINIFRED'S *studio* at Lilley Close ANABEL and WINIFRED working at a model in clay

WINIFRED But isn't it lovely to be in Paris, and to have exhibitions, and to be famous?

ANABEL Paris was a good place But I was never famous

WINIFRED But your little animals and birds were famous Jack said so You know he brought us that bronze thrush that is singing, that is in his room He has only let me see it twice It's the loveliest thing I've ever seen Oh, if I can do anything like that!—I've worshipped it, I have Is it your best thing?

ANABEL One of the best

WINIFRED It must be When I see it, with its beak lifted, singing, something comes loose in my heart, and I feel as if I should cry, and fly up to heaven Do you know what I mean? Oh, I'm sure you do, or you could never have made that thrush Father is so glad you've come to show me how to work He says now I shall have a life-work, and I shall be happy It's true, too

ANABEL Yes, till the life-work collapses

WINIFRED Oh, it can't collapse I can't believe it could collapse Do tell me about something else you made, which you loved—something you sculpted Oh, it makes my heart burn to hear you!—Do you think I might call you Anabel? I should love to You do call me Winifred already

ANABEL Yes, do

WINIFRED Won't you tell me about something else you made—something lovely?

ANABEL Well, I did a small kitten—asleep—with its paws crossed You know, Winifred, that wonderful look that kittens have, as if they were blown along like a bit of fluff—as if they weighed nothing at all—just wafted about—and yet so *alive*—do you know——?

WINIFRED Darlings—darlings—I love them!

ANABEL Well, my kitten really came off—it had that quality It looked as if it had just wafted there

WINIFRED Oh, yes!—oh, I know! And was it in clay?

ANABEL I cut it in soft grey stone as well I loved my kitten An Armenian bought her

WINIFRED And where is she now?

ANABEL I don't know—in Armenia, I suppose, if there is such a place It would have to be kept under glass, because the stone wouldn't polish—and I didn't want it polished But I dislike things under glass—don't you?

WINIFRED Yes, I do We had a golden clock, but Gerald wouldn't have the glass cover, and Daddy wouldn't have it without So now the clock is in Father's room Gerald often went to Paris Oliver used to have a studio there I don't care much for painting—do you?

ANABEL No I want something I can touch, if it's something outside me

WINIFRED Yes, isn't it wonderful, when things are substantial

Gerald and Oliver came back yesterday from Yorkshire You know we have a colliery there

ANABEL Yes, I believe I've heard

WINIFRED I want to introduce you to Gerald, to see if you like him

He's good at the bottom, but he's very overbearing and definite
ANABEL Is he?

WINIFRED Terribly clever in business He'll get awfully rich

ANABEL Isn't he rich enough already?

WINIFRED Oh yes, because Daddy is rich enough, really I think if Gerald was a bit different, he'd be really nice Now he's so *managing* It's sickening Do you dislike managing people, Anabel?

ANABEL I dislike them extremely, Winifred

WINIFRED They're such a bore

ANABEL What does Gerald manage?

WINIFRED Everything You know he's revolutionized the collieries and the whole Company He's made a whole new thing of it, so *modern* Father says he almost wishes he'd let it die out—let the pits be closed But I suppose things *must* be modernized, don't you think? Though it's very unpeaceful, you know, really

ANABEL Decidedly unpeaceful, I should say

WINIFRED The colliers work awfully hard The pits are quite wonderful now Father says it's against nature—all this electricity and so on Gerald adores electricity Isn't it curious?

ANABEL Very How are you getting on?

WINIFRED I don't know It's so hard to make things *balance* as if they were alive Where is the balance in a thing that's alive?

ANABEL The poise? Yes, Winifred—to me, all the *secret* of life is in that—just the—the inexpressible poise of a living thing, that makes it so different from a dead thing To me it's the soul, you know—all living things have it—flowers, trees as well It makes life always marvellous

WINIFRED Ah, yes!—ah, yes! If only I could put it in my model

ANABEL I think you will You are a sculptor, Winifred—Isn't there someone there?

WINIFRED (*running to the door*) Oh, Oliver!

OLIVER Hello, Winnie! Can I come in? This is your sanctum you can keep us out if you like

WINIFRED Oh, no Do you know Miss Wrath, Oliver? She's a famous sculptress

OLIVER Is she? We have met —Is Winifred going to make a sculptress, do you think?

ANABEL I do

OLIVER Good! I like your studio, Winnie Awfully nice up here over the out-buildings Are you happy in it?

WINIFRED Yes, I'm perfectly happy—only I shall *never* be able to make real models, Oliver—it's so difficult

OLIVER Fine room for a party—give us a studio party one day, Win, and we'll dance

WINIFRED (*flying to him*) Yes, Oliver, do let us dance What shall we dance to?

OLIVER Dance?—Dance *Vigni-vignons*—we all know that Ready?

WINIFRED Yes

They begin to sing, dancing meanwhile, in a free little ballet-manner, a wine-dance, dancing separate and then together

*De terre en vigne
La voilà la jolie vigne,
Vigni-vignons—vignons le vin,
La voilà la jolie vigne au vin,
La voilà la jolie vigne*

OLIVER Join in—join in, all

ANABEL *joins in, the three dance and move in rhythm*

WINIFRED I love it—I love it! Do *Ma capote à trois boutons*—you know it, don't you, Anabel? Ready—now——

They begin to dance to a quick little march-rhythm, all singing and dancing till they are out of breath

OLIVER Oh!—tired!—let us sit down

WINIFRED Oliver!—oh, Oliver!—I love you and Anabel

OLIVER Oh, Winifred, I brought you a present—you'll love me more now

WINIFRED Yes, I shall Do give it me

OLIVER I left it in the morning-room I put it on the mantelpiece for you

WINIFRED Shall I go for it?

OLIVER There it is, if you want it

WINIFRED Yes—do you mind? I won't be long

WINIFRED *goes out*

polar bears? He was cold as iron when it is so cold that it burns you Coldness wasn't negative with him It was positive—and awful beyond expression—like the aurora borealis

OLIVER I wonder you ever got back

ANABEL Yes, so do I I feel as if I'd fallen down a fissure in the ice Yet I have come back, haven't I?

OLIVER God knows! At least, Anabel, we've gone through too much ever to start the old game again There'll be no more sticky love between us

ANABEL No, I think there won't, either

OLIVER And what of Gerald?

ANABEL I don't know What do you think of him?

OLIVER I can't think any more I can only blindly go from day to day, now

ANABEL So can I Do you think I was wrong to come back? Do you think I wrong Gerald?

OLIVER No I'm glad you came But I feel I can't *know* anything We must just go on

ANABEL Sometimes I feel I ought never to have come to Gerald again—never—never—never

OLIVER Just left the gap?—Perhaps, if everything has to come asunder But I think, if ever there is to be life—hope,—then you had to come back I always knew it There is something eternal between you and him, and if there is to be any happiness, it depends on that But perhaps there is to *be* no more happiness—for our part of the world

ANABEL (*after a pause*) Yet I feel hope—don't you?

OLIVER Yes, sometimes

ANABEL It seemed to me, especially that winter in Norway,—I can hardly express it,—as if any moment life might give way under one, like thin ice, and one would be more than dead And then I knew my only hope was here—the only hope

OLIVER Yes, I believe it And I believe—

Enter MRS BARLOW

MRS BARLOW Oh, I wanted to speak to you, Oliver

OLIVER Shall I come across?

MRS BARLOW No, not now I believe Father is coming here with Gerald

OLIVER Is he going to walk so far?

MRS BARLOW He will do it—I suppose you know Oliver?

ANABEL Yes, we have met before

MRS BARLOW (to OLIVER) You didn't mention it Where have you met Miss Wrath? She's been about the world, I believe

ANABEL About the world?—no, Mrs Barlow If one happens to know Paris and London——

MRS BARLOW Paris and London! Well, I don't say you are altogether an adventuress My husband seems very pleased with you—for Winifred's sake, I suppose—and he's wrapped up in Winifred

ANABEL Winifred is an artist

MRS BARLOW All my children have the artist in them They get it from my family My father went mad in Rome My family is born with a black fate—they all inherit it

OLIVER I believe one is master of one's fate sometimes, Mrs Barlow There are moments of pure choice

MRS BARLOW Between two ways to the same end, no doubt There's no changing the end

OLIVER I think there is

MRS BARLOW Yes, you have a *parvenu's* presumptuousness somewhere about you

OLIVER Well, better than a blue-blooded fatalism

MRS BARLOW The fate is in the blood you can't change the blood

Enter WINIFRED

WINIFRED Oh, thank you, Oliver, for the wolf and the goat, thank you so much!—The wolf has sprung on the goat, Miss Wrath, and has her by the throat

ANABEL The wolf?

OLIVER It's a little marble group—Italian—in hard marble

WINIFRED The wolf—I love the wolf—he pounces so beautifully His backbone is so terribly fierce I don't feel a bit sorry for the goat, somehow

OLIVER I didn't She is too much like the wrong sort of clergyman

WINIFRED Yes—such a stiff, long face I wish he'd kill her

MRS BARLOW There's a wish!

WINIFRED Father and Gerald are coming That's them, I suppose

Enter MR BARLOW and GERALD

MR BARLOW Ah, good morning—good morning—Quite a little gathering! Ah——

OLIVER The steps tire you, Mr Barlow

MR BARLOW A little—a little—thank you —Well, Miss Wrath, are you quite comfortable here?

ANABEL Very comfortable, thanks

GERALD It was clever of you, Father, to turn this place into a studio

MR BARLOW Yes, Gerald You make the worldly, schemes and I the homely Yes, it's a delightful place I shall come here often if the two young ladies will allow me —By the way, Miss Wrath, I don't know if you have been introduced to my son Gerald I beg your pardon Miss Wrath, Gerald—my son, Miss Wrath (*They bow*) Well, we are quite a gathering, quite a pleasant little gathering We never expected anything so delightful a month ago, did we, Winifred, darling?

WINIFRED No, Daddy, it's much nicer than expectations

MR BARLOW So it is, dear—to have such exceptional companionship and such a pleasant retreat We are very happy to have Miss Wrath with us—very happy

GERALD A studio's awfully nice, you know, it is such a retreat A newspaper has no effect in it—falls quite flat, no matter what the headlines are

MR BARLOW Quite true, Gerald, dear It is a sanctum the world cannot invade—unlike all other sanctuaries, I am afraid

GERALD By the way, Oliver—to go back to profanities—the colliers really are coming out in support of the poor, ill-used clerks

MR BARLOW No, no, Gerald—no, no! Don't be such an alarmist Let us leave these subjects before the ladies No, no the clerks will have their increase quite peacefully

GERALD Yes, dear father—but they can't have it peacefully now We've been threatened already by the colliers—we've already received an ultimatum

MR BARLOW Nonsense, my boy—nonsense! Don't let us split words You won't go against the clerks in such a small matter Always avoid trouble over small matters Don't make bad feeling—don't make bad blood

MRS BARLOW The blood is already rotten in this neighbourhood What it needs is letting out We need a few veins opening, or

we shall have mortification setting in The blood is black

MR BARLOW We won't accept your figure of speech literally, dear
No, Gerald, don't go to war over trifles

GERALD It's just over trifles that one must make war, Father One
can yield gracefully over big matters But to be bullied over trifles
is a sign of criminal weakness

MR BARLOW Ah, not so, not so, my boy When you are as old as I
am, you will know the comparative insignificance of these trifles

GERALD The older I get, Father, the more such trifles stick in my
throat

MR BARLOW Ah, it is an increasingly irritable disposition in you,
my child Nothing costs so bitterly, in the end, as a stubborn
pride

MRS BARLOW Except a stubborn humility—and that will cost you
more Avoid humility, beware of stubborn humility it degrades
Hark, Gerald—fight! When the occasion comes, fight! If it's one
against five thousand, fight! Don't give them your heart on a
dish! Never! If they want to eat your heart out, make them
fight for it, and then give it them poisoned at last, poisoned with
your own blood—What do you say, young woman?

ANABEL Is it for me to speak, Mrs Barlow?

MRS BARLOW Weren't you asked?

ANABEL Certainly I would never give the world my heart on a
dish But can't there ever be peace—real peace?

MRS BARLOW No—not while there is devilish enmity

MR BARLOW You are wrong, dear, you are wrong The peace can
come, the peace that passeth all understanding

MRS BARLOW That there is already between me and Almighty God
I am at peace with the God that made me, and made me proud
With men who humiliate me I am at war Between me and the
shameful humble there is war to the end, though they are
millions and I am one I hate the people Between my race and
them there is war—between them and me, between them and my
children—for ever war, for ever and ever

MR BARLOW Ah, Henrietta—you have said all this before

MRS BARLOW And say it again Fight, Gerald You have my blood
in you, thank God Fight for it, Gerald Spend it as if it were
costly, Gerald, drop by drop Let no dogs lap it—Look at your
father He set his heart on a plate at the door for the poorest

mongrel to eat up See him now, wasted and crossed out like a mistake—and swear, Gerald, swear to be true to my blood in you Never lie down before the mob, Gerald Fight it and stab it, and die fighting It's a lost hope—but fight!

GERALD Don't say these things here, Mother

MRS BARLOW Yes, I will—I will I'll say them before you, and the child Winifred—she knows And before Oliver and the young woman—they know, too

MR BARLOW You see, dear, you can never understand that, although I am weak and wasted, although I may be crossed out from the world like a mistake, I still have peace in my soul, dear, the peace that passeth all understanding

MRS BARLOW And what right have you to it? All very well for you to take peace with you into the other world What do you leave for your sons to inherit?

MR BARLOW The peace of God, Henrietta, if there is no peace among men

MRS BARLOW Then why did you have children? Why weren't you celibate? They have to live among men If they have no place among men, why have you put them there? If the peace of God is no more than the peace of death, why are your sons born of you? How can you have peace with God, if you leave no peace for your sons—no peace, no pride, no place on earth?

GERALD Nay, Mother, nay You shall never blame Father on my behalf

MRS BARLOW Don't trouble—he is blameless—I, a hulking, half-demented woman, I am *glad* when you blame me But don't blame me when I tell you to fight Don't do that, or you will regret it when you must die Ah, your father was stiff and proud enough before men of better rank than himself He was overbearing enough with his equals and his betters But he humbled himself before the poor, he made me ashamed He must hear it—he must hear it! Better he should hear it than die coddling himself with peace His humility, and my pride, they have made a nice ruin of each other Yet he is the man I wanted to marry—he is the man I would marry again But never, never again would I give way before his goodness Gerald, if you must be true to your father, be true to me as well Don't set me down at nothing because I haven't a humble case.

GERALD No, Mother—no, dear Mother You see, dear Mother, I have rather a job between the two halves of myself When you come to have the wild horses in your own soul, Mother, it makes it difficult

MRS BARLOW Never mind, you'll have help

GERALD Thank you for the assurance, darling—Father, you don't mind what Mother says, I hope I believe there's some truth in it—don't you?

MR BARLOW I have nothing to say

WINIFRED I think there's some truth in it, Daddy You were always worrying about those horrid colliers, and they didn't care a bit about you And they *ought* to have cared a million pounds

MR BARLOW You don't understand, my child

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE *Evening of the same day Drawing-room at Lilley Close*

MR BARLOW, GERALD, WINIFRED, ANABEL, OLIVER *present*

BUTLER *pours coffee*

MR BARLOW And you are quite a stranger in these parts, Miss Wrath?

ANABEL Practically But I was born at Derby

MR BARLOW I was born in this house—but it was a different affair then my father was a farmer, you know The coal has brought us what moderate wealth we have Of course, we were never poor or needy—farmers, substantial farmers And I think we were happier so—yes—Winnie, dear, hand Miss Wrath the sweets I hope they're good I ordered them from London for you—Oliver, my boy, have you everything you like? That's right—It gives me such pleasure to see a little festive gathering in this room again I wish Bertie and Elinor might be here What time is it, Gerald?

GERALD A quarter to nine, Father

MR BARLOW Not late yet I can sit with you another half-hour I am feeling better to-day Winifred, sing something to us

WINIFRED Something jolly, Father?

MR BARLOW Very jolly, darling

WINIFRED I'll sing "The Lincolnshire Poacher", shall I?

MR BARLOW Do, darling, and we'll all join in the chorus—Will you join in the chorus, Miss Wrath?

ANABEL I will It is a good song

MR BARLOW Yes, isn't it!

WINIFRED All dance for the chorus, as well as singing

They sing, some piroquette a little for the chorus

MR BARLOW Ah, splendid, splendid! There is nothing like gaiety

WINIFRED I do love to dance about I know let us do a little ballet—four of us—oh, do!

GERALD What ballet, Winifred?

WINIFRED Any Eva can play for us She plays well

MR BARLOW 'You won't disturb your mother? Don't disturb Eva if she is busy with your mother

Exit WINIFRED

If only I can see Winifred happy, my heart is at rest if only I can hope for her to be happy in her life

GERALD Oh, Winnie's alright, Father—especially now she has Miss Wrath to initiate her into the mysteries of life and labour

ANABEL Why are you ironical?

MR BARLOW Oh, Miss Wrath, believe me, we all feel that—it is the greatest possible pleasure to me that you have come

GERALD I wasn't ironical, I assure you

MR BARLOW No, indeed—no, indeed! We have every belief in you

ANABEL But why should you have?

MR BARLOW Ah, my dear child, allow us the credit of our own discernment And don't take offence at my familiarity I am afraid I am spoilt since I am an invalid

Re-enter WINIFRED, with EVA

MR BARLOW Come, Eva, you will excuse us for upsetting your evening Will you be so good as to play something for us to dance to?

EVA Yes, sir What shall I play?

WINIFRED Mozart—I'll find you the piece Mozart's the saddest musician in the world—but he's the best to dance to

MR BARLOW Why, how is it you are such a connoisseur in sadness, darling?

GERALD She isn't She's a flagrant amateur

EVA plays, they dance a little ballet

MR BARLOW Charming—charming, Miss Wrath will you allow me to say *Anabel*, we shall all feel so much more at home? Yes—thank you—er—you enter into the spirit of it wonderfully, Anabel, dear The others are accustomed to play together But it is not so easy to come in on occasion as you do

GERALD Oh, Anabel's a genius!—I beg your pardon, Miss Wrath—familiarity is catching

MR BARLOW Gerald, my boy, don't forget that you are virtually host here

EVA Did you want any more music, sir?

GERALD No, don't stay, Eva We mustn't tire Father

Exit EVA

that, on the whole, we were a comfortable and happy community Barlow and Walsall's men were not unhappy in those days, I believe We were liberal, the men lived

OLIVER Yes, that is true Even twenty years ago the place was still jolly

MR BARLOW And then, when Gerald was a lad of thirteen, came the great lock-out We belonged to the Masters' Federation—I was but one man on the Board We had to abide by the decision The mines were closed till the men would accept the reduction—Well, that cut my life across We were shutting the men out from work, starving their families, in order to force them to accept a reduction It may be the condition of trade made it imperative But, for myself, I would rather have lost everything—Of course, we did what we could Food was very cheap—practically given away We had open kitchen here And it was mercifully warm summer-time Nevertheless, there was privation and suffering, and trouble and bitterness We had the redcoats down—even to guard this house And from this window I saw Whatmore head-stocks ablaze, and before I could get to the spot the soldiers had shot two poor fellows They were not killed, thank God—

OLIVER Ah, but they enjoyed it—they enjoyed it immensely I remember what grand old sporting weeks they were It was like a fox-hunt, so lively and gay—bands and tea-parties and excitement everywhere, pit-ponies loose, men all over the countryside—

MR BARLOW There was a great deal of suffering which you were too young to appreciate However, since that year I have had to acknowledge a new situation—a radical if unspoken opposition between masters and men Since that year we have been split into opposite camps Whatever I might privately feel, I was one of the owners, one of the masters, and therefore in the opposite camp To my men I was an oppressor, a representative of injustice and greed Privately, I like to think that even to this day they bear me no malice; that they have some lingering regard for me But the master stands before the human being, and the condition of war overrides individuals—they hate the master, even whilst, as a human being, he would be their friend I recognize the inevitable justice It is the price one has to pay

ANABEL Yes, it is difficult—very

MR BARLOW Perhaps I weary you?

ANABEL Oh, no—no

MR BARLOW Well—then the mines began to pay badly The seams ran thin and unprofitable, work was short Either we must close down or introduce a new system, American methods, which I dislike so extremely Now it really became a case of men working against machines, flesh and blood working against iron, for a livelihood Still, it had to be done—the whole system revolutionized Gerald took it in hand—and now I hardly know my own pits, with the great electric plants and strange machinery, and the new coal-cutters—iron men, as the colliers call them—everything running at top speed, utterly dehumanized, inhuman Well, it had to be done, it was the only alternative to closing down and throwing three thousand men out of work And Gerald has done it But I can't bear to see it The men of this generation are not like my men They are worn and gloomy, they have a hollow look that I can't bear to see They are a great grief to me I remember my men even twenty years ago—a noisy, lively, careless set, who kept the place ringing Now it is too quiet—too quiet There is something wrong in the quietness, something unnatural I feel it is unnatural, I feel afraid of it And I cannot help feeling guilty

ANABEL Yes—I understand It terrifies me

MR BARLOW Does it?—does it?—Yes—And as my wife says, I leave it all to Gerald—this terrible situation But I appeal to God, if anything in my power could have averted it, I would have averted it I would have made any sacrifice For it is a great and bitter trouble to me

ANABEL Ah, well, in death there is no industrial situation Something must be different there

MR BARLOW Yes—yes

OLIVER And you see sacrifice isn't the slightest use If only people would be sane and decent

MR BARLOW Yes, indeed—Would you be so good as to ring, Oliver? I think I must go to bed

ANABEL Ah, you have over-tired yourself

MR BARLOW No, my dear—not over-tired Excuse me if I have burdened you with all this It relieves me to speak of it

ANABEL I realize *how* terrible it is, Mr Barlow—and how helpless one is

MR BARLOW Thank you, my dear, for your sympathy

OLIVER If the people for one minute pulled themselves up and conquered their mania for money and machine excitement, the whole thing would be solved—Would you like me to find Winnie and tell her to say good night to you?

MR BARLOW If you would be so kind (*Exit OLIVER*) Can't you find a sweet that you would like, my dear? Won't you take a little cherry brandy?

Enter BUTLER

ANABEL Thank you

WILLIAM You will go up, sir?

MR BARLOW Yes, William

WILLIAM You are tired to-night, sir

MR BARLOW It has come over me just now

WILLIAM I wish you went up before you became so over-tired, sir
Would you like Nurse?

MR BARLOW No, I'll go with you, William Good night, my dear

ANABEL Good night, Mr Barlow I am so sorry if you are over-tired

Exit BUTLER and MR BARLOW ANABEL takes a drink and goes to the fire Enter GERALD

GERALD Father gone up?

ANABEL Yes

GERALD I thought I heard him Has he been talking too much?—
Poor Father, he will take things to heart

ANABEL Tragic, really

GERALD Yes, I suppose it is But one can get beyond tragedy—beyond the state of feeling tragical, I mean Father himself is tragical One feels he is mistaken—and yet he wouldn't be any different, and be himself, I suppose He's sort of crucified on an idea of the working people It's rather horrible when he's one father—However, apart from tragedy, how do you like being here, in this house?

ANABEL I like the house It's rather too comfortable

GERALD Yes But how do you like being here?

ANABEL How do you like my being in your home?

GERALD Oh, I think you're very decorative

ANABEL More decorative than comfortable?

GERALD Perhaps But perhaps you give the necessary finish to the establishment

ANABEL Like the correct window-curtains?

GERALD Yes, something like that I say, why did you come, Anabel? Why did you come slap-bang into the middle of us?—It's not expostulation—I want to know

ANABEL You mean you want to be told

GERALD Yes, I want to be told

ANABEL That's rather mean of you You should savvy, and let it go without saying

GERALD Yes, but I don't savvy

ANABEL Then wait till you do

GERALD No, I want to be told There's a difference in you, Anabel, that puts me out, rather You're sort of softer and sweeter—I'm not sure whether it isn't a touch of Father in you There's a little sanctified smudge on your face Are you really a bit sanctified?

ANABEL No, not sanctified It's true I feel different I feel I want a new way of life—something more dignified, more religious, if you like—anyhow, something *positive*

GERALD Is it the change of heart, Anabel?

ANABEL Perhaps it is, Gerald

GERALD I'm not sure that I like it Isn't it like a berry that decides to get very sweet, and goes soft?

ANABEL I don't think so

GERALD Slightly sanctimonious I think I liked you better before I don't think I like you with this touch of aureole People seem to me so horribly self-satisfied when they get a change of heart—they take such a fearful lot of credit to themselves on the strength of it

ANABEL I don't think I do—Do you feel no different, Gerald?

GERALD Radically, I can't say I do—I feel very much more *in* different

ANABEL What to?

GERALD Everything

ANABEL You're still angry—that's what it is

GERALD Oh yes, I'm angry But that is part of my normal state

ANABEL Why are you angry?

GERALD Is there any reason why I shouldn't be angry? I'm angry

because you treated me—well, so impudently, really—clearing out and leaving one to whistle to the empty walls

ANABEL Don't you think it was time I cleared out, when you became so violent, and really dangerous, really like a madman?

GERALD Time or not time, you went—you disappeared and left us high and dry—and I am still angry —But I'm not only angry about that I'm angry with the colliers, with Labour for its low-down impudence—and I'm angry with Father for being so ill—and I'm angry with Mother for looking such a hopeless thing—and I'm angry with Oliver because he thinks so much—

ANABEL And what are you angry with yourself for?

GERALD I'm angry with myself for being myself—I always was that I was always a curse to myself

ANABEL And that's why you curse others so much?

GERALD You talk as if butter wouldn't melt in your mouth

ANABEL You see, Gerald, there has to be a change You'll have to change

GERALD Change of heart?—Well, it won't be to get softer, Anabel

ANABEL You needn't be softer But you can be quieter, more sane even There ought to be some part of you that can be quiet and apart from the world, some part that can be happy and gentle

GERALD Well, there isn't I don't pretend to be able to extricate a soft sort of John Halifax, Gentleman, out of the machine I'm mixed up in, and keep him to gladden the connubial hearth I'm angry, and I'm angry right through, and I'm not going to play bo-peep with myself, pretending I'm not

ANABEL Nobody asks you to But is there no part of you that can be a bit gentle and peaceful and happy with a woman?

GERALD No, there isn't—I'm not going to smug with you—no, not I You're smug in your coming back You feel virtuous, and expect me to rise to it I won't

ANABEL Then I'd better have stayed away

GERALD If you want me to virtue-ize and smug with you, you had

ANABEL What do you want, then?

GERALD I don't know I know I don't want *that*

ANABEL Oh, very well (*Goes to the piano, begins to play*)

Enter MRS BARLOW

GERALD Hell, Mother! Father *has* gone to bed

MRS BARLOW Oh, I thought he was down here talking You two alone?

GERALD With the piano for chaperone, Mother

MRS BARLOW That's more than I gave you credit for I haven't come to chaperone you either, Gerald

GERALD Chaperone *me*, Mother! Do you think I need it?

MRS BARLOW If you do, you won't get it I've come too late to be of any use in ~~that~~ way, as far as I hear

GERALD What have you heard, Mother?

MRS BARLOW I heard Oliver and this young woman talking

GERALD Oh, did you? When? What did they say?

MRS BARLOW Something about married in the sight of heaven, but couldn't keep it up on earth

GERALD I don't understand

MRS BARLOW That you and this young woman were married in the sight of heaven, or through eternity, or something similar, but that you couldn't make up your minds to it on earth

GERALD Really! That's very curious, Mother

MRS BARLOW Very common occurrence, I believe

GERALD Yes, so it is But I don't think you heard quite right, dear There seems to be some lingering uneasiness in heaven as a matter of fact We'd quite made up our minds to live apart on earth But where did you hear this, Mother?

MRS BARLOW I heard it outside the studio door this morning

GERALD You mean you happened to be on one side of the door while Oliver and Anabel were talking on the other?

MRS BARLOW You'd make a detective, Gerald—you're so good at putting two and two together I listened till I'd heard as much as I wanted I'm not sure I didn't come down here hoping to hear another conversation going on

GERALD Listen outside the door, darling?

MRS BARLOW There'd be nothing to listen to if I were inside

GERALD It isn't usually done, you know

MRS BARLOW I listen outside doors ~~when~~ when I have occasion to be interested—which isn't often, unfortunately for me

GERALD But I've a queer feeling that you have a permanent occasion to be interested in me I only half like it

MRS BARLOW It's surprising how uninteresting you are, Gerald, for

a man of your years I have not had occasion to listen outside a door, for you, no, not for a great while, believe me

GERALD I believe you implicitly, darling But do you happen to know me through and through, and in and out, all my past and present doings, Mother? Have you a secret access to my room, and a spy-hole, and all those things? This is uncomfortably thrilling You take on a new lustre

MRS BARLOW Your memoirs wouldn't make you famous, my son

GERALD Infamous, dear?

MRS BARLOW Good heavens, no! What a lot you expect from your very mild sins! You and this young woman have lived together, then?

GERALD Don't say "this young woman", Mother dear—it's slightly vulgar It isn't for me to compromise Anabel by admitting such a thing, you know

MRS BARLOW Do you ask me to call her Anabel? I won't

GERALD Then say "this person", Mother It's more becoming

MRS BARLOW I didn't come to speak to you, Gerald I know you I came to speak to this young woman

GERALD "Person", Mother—Will you curtsy, Anabel? And I'll twist my handkerchief We shall make a Cruikshank drawing, if Mother makes her hair a little more slovenly

MRS BARLOW You and Gerald were together for some time?

GERALD Three years, off and on, Mother

MRS BARLOW And then you suddenly dropped my son, and went away?

GERALD To Norway, Mother—so I have gathered

MRS BARLOW And now you have come back because that last one died?

GERALD Is he dead, Anabel? How did he die?

ANABEL He was killed on the ice

GERALD Oh, God!

MRS BARLOW Now, having had your fill of tragedy, you have come back to be demure and to marry Gerald Does he thank you?

GERALD You must listen outside the door, Mother, to find that out

MRS BARLOW Well, it's your own affair

GERALD What a lame summing up, Mother!—quite unworthy of you

ANABEL What did you wish to say to me, Mrs Barlow? Please say it

MRS BARLOW What did I wish to say? Ay, what did I wish to say! What is the use of my saying anything? What am I but a buffoon and a slovenly caricature in the family?

GERALD No, Mother dear, don't climb down—please don't Tell Anabel what you wanted to say

MRS BARLOW Yes—yes—yes I came to say—don't be good to my son—don't be good to him

GERALD Sounds weak, dear—mere contrariness

MRS BARLOW Don't presume to be good to my son, young woman I won't have it, even if he will You hear me?

ANABEL Yes I won't presume, then

GERALD May she presume to be bad to me, Mother?

MRS BARLOW For that you may look after yourself—But a woman who was good to him would ruin him in six months, take the manhood out of him He has a tendency, a secret hankering, to make a gift of himself to somebody He shan't do it I warn you I am not a woman to be despised

ANABEL No—I understand

MRS BARLOW Only one other thing I ask If he must fight—and fight he must—let him alone don't you try to shield him or save him *Don't interfere*—do you hear?

ANABEL Not till I must

MRS BARLOW *Never* Learn your place, and keep it Keep away from him, if you are going to be a wife to him Don't go too near And don't let him come too near Beat him off if he tries Keep a solitude in your heart even when you love him best Keep it If you lose it, you lose everything

GERALD But that isn't love, Mother

MRS BARLOW What?

GERALD That isn't love

MRS BARLOW *What?* What do you know of love, you ninny? You only know the feeding-bottle It's what you want, all of you—to be brought up by hand, and mew about love Ah, God!—Ah, God!—that you should none of you know the only thing which would make you worth having

GERALD I don't believe in your only thing, Mother But what is it?

MRS BARLOW What you haven't got—the power to be alone

JOB ARTHUR No, I can't say I do

GERALD My mother does Will you have anything to drink? Will you help yourself?

JOB ARTHUR Well—no—I don't think I'll have anything, thanks

GERALD A cherry brandy?—Yes?—Anabel, what's yours

ANABEL Did I see Kummel?

GERALD You did (*They all take drinks*) What's the latest, Mr Freer?

JOB ARTHUR The latest? Well, I don't know, I'm sure——

GERALD Oh, yes Trot it out We're quite private

JOB ARTHUR Well—I don't know There's several things

GERALD The more the merrier

JOB ARTHUR I'm not so sure The men are in a very funny temper, Mr Barlow—very funny

GERALD Coincidence—so am I Not surprising, is it?

JOB ARTHUR The men, perhaps not

GERALD What else, Job Arthur?

JOB ARTHUR You know the men have decided to stand by the office men?

GERALD Yes

JOB ARTHUR They've agreed to come out next Monday

GERALD Have they?

JOB ARTHUR Yes, there was no stopping them They decided for it like one man

GERALD How was that?

JOB ARTHUR That's what surprises me They're a jolly sight more certain over this than they've ever been over their own interests

GERALD All their love for the office clerks coming out in a rush?

JOB ARTHUR Well, I don't know about love, but that's how it is

GERALD What is it, if it isn't love?

JOB ARTHUR I can't say They're in a funny temper It's hard to make out

GERALD A funny temper, are they? Then I suppose we ought to laugh

JOB ARTHUR No, I don't think it's a laughing matter They're coming out on Monday for certain

GERALD Yes—so are daffodils

JOB ARTHUR Beg pardon?

GERALD Daffodils

JOB ARTHUR No, I don't follow what you mean

GERALD Don't you? But I thought Alfred Breffitt and William Straw were not very popular

JOB ARTHUR No, they aren't—not in themselves But it's the principle of the thing—so it seems

GERALD What principle?

JOB ARTHUR Why, all sticking together, for one thing—all Barlow and Walsall's men holding by one another

GERALD United we stand?

JOB ARTHUR That's it And then it's the strong defending the weak as well There's three thousand colliers standing up for thirty-odd office men I must say I think it's sporting myself

GERALD You do, do you? United we stand, divided we fall What do they stand for, really? What is it?

JOB ARTHUR Well—for their right to a living wage That's how I see it

GERALD For their right to a living wage! Just that?

JOB ARTHUR Yes, sir—that's how I see it

GERALD Well, that doesn't seem so preposterously difficult, does it?

JOB ARTHUR Why, that's what I think myself, Mr Gerald It's such a little thing

GERALD Quite I suppose the men themselves are to judge what is a living wage?

JOB ARTHUR Oh, I think they're quite reasonable, you know

GERALD Oh, yes, eminently reasonable Reason's their strong point—And if they get their increase, they'll be quite contented?

JOB ARTHUR Yes, as far as I know, they will

GERALD As far as you know? Why, is there something you don't know?—something you're not sure about?

JOB ARTHUR No—I don't think so I think they'll be quite satisfied this time

GERALD Why this time? Is there going to be a next time—every-day-has-its-to-morrow kind of thing?

JOB ARTHUR I don't know about that It's a funny world, Mr Barlow

GERALD Yes, I quite believe it How do you see it funny?

JOB ARTHUR Oh, I don't know Everything's in a funny state

GERALD What do you mean by everything?

JOB ARTHUR Well—I mean things in general—Labour, for example

GERALD You think Labour's in a funny state, do you? What do you think it wants? What do you think, personally?

JOB ARTHUR Well, in my own mind, I think it wants a bit of its own back

GERALD And how does it mean to get it?

JOB ARTHUR Ha! that's not so easy to say But it means to have it, in the long run

GERALD You mean by increasing demands for higher wages?

JOB ARTHUR Yes, perhaps that's one road

GERALD Do you see any other?

JOB ARTHUR Not just for the present

GERALD But later on?

JOB ARTHUR I can't say about that The men will be quiet enough for a bit, if it's alright about the office men, you know

GERALD Probably But have Barlow and Walsall's men any special grievance apart from the rest of the miners?

JOB ARTHUR I don't know They've no liking for you, you know, sir

GERALD Why?

JOB ARTHUR They think you've got a down on them

GERALD Why should they?

JOB ARTHUR I don't know, sir, but they do

GERALD So they have a personal feeling against me? You don't think all the colliers are the same, all over the country?

JOB ARTHUR I think there's a good deal of feeling——

GERALD Of wanting their own back?

JOB ARTHUR That's it

GERALD But what can they do? I don't see what they can do They can go out on strike—but they've done that before, and the owners, at a pinch, can stand it better than they can As for the ruin of the industry, if they do ruin it, it falls heaviest on them In fact, it leaves them destitute There's nothing they can do, you know, that doesn't hit them worse than it hits us

JOB ARTHUR I know there's something in that But if they had a strong man to head them, you see——

GERALD Yes, I've heard a lot about that strong man—but I've never come across any signs of him, you know I don't believe in one strong man appearing out of so many little men All men

are pretty big in an age, or in a movement, which produces a really big man And Labour is a great swarm of hopelessly little men That's how I see it

JOB ARTHUR I'm not so sure about that

GERALD I am Labour is a thing that can't have a head It's a sort of unwieldy monster that's bound to run its skull against the wall sooner or later, and knock out what bit of brain it's got You see, you need wit and courage and real understanding if you're going to do anything positive And Labour has none of these things—certainly it shows no sign of them

JOB ARTHUR Yes, when it has a chance, I think you'll see plenty of courage and plenty of understanding

GERALD It always has a chance And where one sees a bit of courage, there's no understanding, and where there's some understanding, there's absolutely no courage It's hopeless, you know—it would be far best if they'd all give it up, and try a new line

JOB ARTHUR I don't think they will

GERALD No, I don't either They'll make a mess, and when they've made it, they'll never get out of it They can't—they're too stupid

JOB ARTHUR They've never had a try yet

GERALD They're trying every day They just simply couldn't control modern industry—they haven't the intelligence They've no *life* intelligence The owners may have little enough, but Labour has none They're just mechanical little things that can make one or two motions, and they're done They've no more idea of life than a lawn-mower has

JOB ARTHUR It remains to be seen

GERALD No, it doesn't It's perfectly obvious—there's nothing remains to be seen All that Labour is capable of, is smashing things up And even for that I don't believe it has either energy or the courage or the bit of necessary passion, or slap-dash—call it whatever you will However, we'll see

JOB ARTHUR Yes, sir Perhaps you see now why you're not so very popular, Mr Gerald

GERALD We can't all be popular, Job Arthur You're very high up in popularity, I believe

JOB ARTHUR Not so very They listen to me a bit But you never

know when they'll let you down I know they'll let me down one day—so it won't be a surprise

GERALD I should think not

JOB ARTHUR But about the office men, Mr Gerald You think it'll be alright?

GERALD Oh, yes, that'll be alright

JOB ARTHUR Easiest for this time, anyhow, sir We don't want bloodshed, do we?

GERALD I shouldn't mind at all It might clear the way to something But I have absolutely no belief in the power of Labour even to bring about anything so positive as bloodshed

JOB ARTHUR I don't know about that—I don't know—Well

GERALD Have another drink before you go—Yes, do Help yourself

JOB ARTHUR Well—if you're so pressing (*Helps himself*) Here's luck, all!

ALL Thanks

GERALD Take a cigar—there's the box Go on—take a handful—fill your case

JOB ARTHUR They're a great luxury nowadays, aren't they? Almost beyond a man like me

GERALD Yes, that's the worst of not being a bloated capitalist Never mind, you'll be a Cabinet Minister some day—Oh, alright—I'll open the door for you

JOB ARTHUR Oh, don't trouble Good night—good night

Exeunt JOB ARTHUR and GERALD

OLIVER Oh God, what a world to live in!

ANABEL I rather liked him What is he?

OLIVER Checkweighman—local secretary for the Miners' Federation—plays the violin well, although he was a collier, and it spoilt his hands They're a musical family

ANABEL But isn't he rather nice?

OLIVER I don't like him But I confess he's a study He's the modern Judas

ANABEL Don't you think he likes Gerald?

OLIVER I'm sure he does The way he suns himself here—like a cat purring in his luxuriation

ANABEL Yes, I don't mind it It shows a certain sensitiveness and a certain taste

OLIVER Yes, ³he has both—touch of the artist, as Mrs Barlow says
He loves refinement, culture, breeding, all those things—loves
them—and a presence, a fine free manner

ANABEL But that is nice in him

OLIVER Quite But what he loves, and what he admires, and what
he aspires to, he *must* betray It's his fatality He lives for the
moment when he can kiss Gerald in the Garden of Olives, or
wherever it was

ANABEL But Gerald shouldn't be kissed

OLIVER That's what I say

ANABEL And that's what his mother means as well, I suppose

Enter GERALD

GERALD Well—you've heard the voice of the people

ANABEL He isn't the people

GERALD I think he is, myself—the epitome

OLIVER No, he's a special type

GERALD Ineffectual, don't you think?

ANABEL How pleased you are, Gerald! How pleased you are with
yourself! You love the turn with him

GERALD It's rather stimulating, you know

ANABEL It oughtn't to be, then

OLIVER He's your Judas, and you love him

GERALD Nothing so deep He's just a sort of Æolian harp that
sings to the temper of the wind I find him amusing

ANABEL I think it's boring

OLIVER And I think it's nasty

GERALD I believe you're both jealous of him What do you think
of the British working man, Oliver?

OLIVER It seems to me he's in nearly as bad a way as the British
employer he's nearly as much beside the point

GERALD What point?

OLIVER Oh, just life

GERALD That's too vague, my boy Do you think they'll ever make
a bust-up?

OLIVER I can't tell I don't see any good in it, if they do

GERALD It might clear the way—and it might block the way for
ever depends what comes through But, sincerely, I don't think
they've got it in them

ANABEL They may have something better

GERALD That suggestion doesn't interest me, Anabel! Ah well, we shall see what we shall see. Have a whisky and soda with me, Oliver, and let the troubled course of this evening run to a smooth close. It's quite like old times. Aren't you smoking, Anabel?

ANABEL No, thanks

GERALD I believe you're a reformed character. So it won't be like old times, after all.

ANABEL I don't want old times. I want new ones.

GERALD Wait till Job Arthur has risen like Antichrist, and proclaimed the resurrection of the gods—Do you see Job Arthur proclaiming Dionysus and Aphrodite?

ANABEL It bores me. I don't like your mood. Good night.

GERALD Oh, don't go.

ANABEL Yes, good night.

Exit ANABEL

OLIVER She's *not* reformed, Gerald. She's the same old moral character—moral to the last bit of her, really—as she always was.

GERALD Is that what it is?—But one must be moral.

OLIVER Oh, yes. Oliver Cromwell wasn't as moral as Anabel is—nor such an iconoclast.

GERALD Poor old Anabel!

OLIVER How she hates the dark gods!

GERALD And yet they cast a spell over her. Poor old Anabel! Well, Oliver, is Bacchus the father of whisky?

OLIVER I don't know—I don't like you either. You seem to smile all over yourself. It's objectionable. Good night.

GERALD Oh, look here, this is censorious.

OLIVER You smile to yourself.

Exit OLIVER

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE I

An old park Early evening In the background a low Georgian hall, which has been turned into offices for the Company, shows windows already lighted GERALD and ANABEL walk along the path

ANABEL How beautiful this old park is!

GERALD Yes, it is beautiful—seems so far away from everywhere, if one doesn't remember that the hall is turned into offices—No one has lived here since I was a little boy I remember going to a Christmas party at the Walsalls'

ANABEL Has it been shut up so long?

GERALD The Walsalls didn't like it—too near the ugliness They were county, you know—we never were Father never gave Mother a chance, there And besides, the place is damp, cellars full of water

ANABEL Even now?

GERALD No, not now—they've been drained But the place would be too damp for a dwelling-house It's alright as offices They burn enormous fires The rooms are quite charming This is what happens to the stately homes of England—they buzz with inky clerks, or their equivalent Stateliness is on its last legs

ANABEL Yes, it grieves me—though I should be bored if I had to be stately, I think—Isn't it beautiful in this light, like an eighteenth-century aquatint? I'm sure no age was as ugly as this, since the world began

GERALD For pure ugliness, certainly not And I believe none has been so filthy to live in—Let us sit down a minute, shall we? and watch the rooks fly home It always stirs sad, sentimental feelings in me

ANABEL So it does in me—Listen! one can hear the coal-carts on the road—and the brook—and the dull noise of the town—and the beating of New London pit—and voices—and the rooks—and yet it is so still We seem so still here, don't we?

shall have to hate each other a little more—I suppose hate is a real process

ANABEL Yes, I know you believe more in hate than in love

GERALD Nobody is more weary of hate than I am—and yet we can't fix our own hour, when we shall leave off hating and fighting It has to work itself out in us

ANABEL But I don't *want* to hate and fight with you any more I don't *believe* in it—not any more

GERALD It's a cleansing process—like Aristotle's Katharsis We shall hate ourselves clean at last, I suppose

ANABEL Why aren't you clean now? Why can't you love? (*He laughs*) Do you love me?

GERALD Yes

ANABEL Do you want to be with me for ever?

GERALD Yes

ANABEL Sure?

GERALD Quite sure

ANABEL Why are you so cool about it?

GERALD I'm not I'm only sure—which you are not

ANABEL Yes, I am—I *want* to be married to you

GERALD I know you want me to want you to be married to me But whether off your own bat you have a positive desire that way, I'm not sure You keep something back—some sort of female reservation—like a dagger up your sleeve You want to see me in transports of love for you

ANABEL How can you say so? There—you see—there—this is the man that pretends to love me, and then says I keep a dagger up my sleeve You liar!

GERALD I do love you—and you do keep a dagger up your sleeve—some devilish little female reservation which spies at me from a distance, in your soul, all the time, as if I were an enemy

ANABEL How can you say so?—Doesn't it show what you must be yourself? Doesn't it show?—What is there in your soul?

GERALD I don't know

ANABEL Love, pure love?—Do you pretend it's love?

GERALD I'm so tired of this

ANABEL So am I, dead tired you self-deceiving, self-complacent thing Ha!—aren't you just the same You haven't altered one scrap, not a scrap

GERALD Alright—you are always free to change yourself

ANABEL I *have* changed, I *am* better, I *do* love you—I love you wholly and unselfishly—I do—and I want a good new life with you

GERALD You're terribly wrapped up in your new goodness I wish you'd make up your mind to be downright bad

ANABEL Ha!—Do you?—You'd soon see You'd soon see where you'd be if— There's somebody coming (*Rises*)

GERALD Never mind, it's the clerks leaving work, I suppose Sit still

ANABEL Won't you go?

GERALD No (*A man draws near, followed by another*) Good evening

CLERK Good evening, sir (*Passes on*) Good evening, Mr Barlow

ANABEL They are afraid

GERALD I suppose their consciences are uneasy about this strike

ANABEL Did you come to sit here just to catch them, like a spider waiting for them?

GERALD No I wanted to speak to Breffitt

ANABEL I believe you're capable of any horridness

GERALD Alright, you believe it (*Two more figures approach*) Good evening

CLERKS Good night, sir (*One passes, one stops*) Good evening, Mr Barlow Er—did you want to see Mr Breffitt, sir?

GERALD Not particularly

CLERK Oh! He'll be out directly, sir—if you'd like me to go back and tell him you wanted him

GERALD No, thank you

CLERK Good night, sir Excuse me asking

GERALD Good night

ANABEL Who is Mr Breffitt?

GERALD He is the chief clerk—and cashier—one of Father's old pillars of society

ANABEL Don't you like him?

GERALD Not much

ANABEL Why?—You seem to dislike very easily

GERALD Oh, they all used to try to snub me, these old buffers They detest me like poison, because I am different from Father

ANABEL I believe you enjoy being detested

GERALD I do (*Another clerk approaches—hesitates—stops*)

CLERK Good evening, sir Good evening, Mr Barlow Er—did you want anybody at the office,,sir? We're just closing

GERALD No, I didn't want anybody

CLERK Oh, no, sir I see Er—by the way, sir—er—I hope you don't think this—er—bother about an increase—this strike threat—started in the office

GERALD Where did it start?

CLERK I should think it started—where it usually starts, Mr Barlow—among a few loud-mouthed people who think they can do as they like with the men They're only using the office men as a cry—that's all They've no interest in us They want to show their power —That's how it is, sir

GERALD Oh, yes

CLERK We're powerless, if they like to make a cry out of us

GERALD Quite

CLERK We're as much put out about it as anybody

GERALD Of course

CLERK Yes—well—good night, sir (*Clerks draw near—there is a sound of loud young voices and bicycle bells Bicycles sweep past*)

CLERKS Good night, sir—Good night, sir

GERALD Good night—They're very bucked to see me sitting here with a woman—a young lady as they'll say I guess your name will be flying round to-morrow They stop partly to have a good look at you Do they know you, do you think?

ANABEL Sure

CLERKS Mr Breffitt's just coming, sir—Good night, sir—Good night, sir (*Another bicycle passes*)

ANABEL The bicycles don't see us —Isn't it rather hateful to be a master? The attitude of them all is so ugly I can quite see that it makes you rather a bully

GERALD I suppose it does (*Figure of a large man approaches*)

BREFFITT Oh—ah—it's Mr Gerald!—I couldn't make out who it was—Were you coming up to the office, sir? Do you want me to go back with you?

GERALD No, thank you—I just wanted a word with you about this agitation It'll do just as well here It's a pity it started—that the office should have set it going, Breffitt

BREFFITT It's none of the office's doing, I think you'll find, Mr Gerald. The office men did nothing but ask for a just advance—at any rate, times and prices being what they are, I consider it a fair advance. If the men took it up, it's because they've got a set of loud-mouthed blatherers and agitators among them like Job Arthur Freer, who deserve to be hung—and hanging they'd get, if I could have the judging of them.

GERALD Well—it's very unfortunate—because we can't give the clerks their increase now, you know.

BREFFITT Can't you?—can't you? I can't see that it would be anything out of the way, if I say what I think.

GERALD No. They won't get any increase now. It shouldn't have been allowed to become a public cry with the colliers. We can't give in now.

BREFFITT Have the Board decided that?

GERALD They have—on my advice.

BREFFITT Hm! then the men will come out.

GERALD We will see.

BREFFITT It's trouble for nothing—it's trouble that could be avoided. The clerks could have their advance, and it would hurt nobody.

GERALD Too late now—I suppose if the men come out, the clerks will come out with them?

BREFFITT They'll have to—they'll have to.

GERALD If they do, we may then make certain alterations in the office staff, which have needed making for some time.

BREFFITT Very good—very good. I know what you mean—I don't know how your father bears all this, Mr Gerald.

GERALD We keep it from him as much as possible—You'll let the clerks know the decision. And if they stay out with the men, I'll go over the list of the staff with you. It has needed revising for a long time.

BREFFITT I know what you mean—I know what you mean—I believe I understand the firm's interest in my department. I ought, after forty years studying it, I've studied the firm's interests for forty years, Mr Gerald. I'm not likely to forget them now.

GERALD Of course.

BREFFITT But I think it's a mistake—I think it's a mistake, and I'm bound to say it, to let a great deal of trouble rise for a very

small cause The clerks might have had what they reasonably asked for

GERALD Well, it's too late now

BREFFITT I suppose it is—I suppose it is I hope you'll remember sir, that I've put the interest of the firm before everything—before every consideration

GERALD Of course, Breffitt

BREFFITT But you've not had any liking for the office staff, I'm afraid, sir—not since your father put you amongst us for a few months—Well, sir, we shall weather this gale, I hope, as we've weathered those in the past Times don't become better, do they? Men are an ungrateful lot, and these agitators should be lynched They would, if I had my way

GERALD Yes, of course Don't wait

BREFFITT Good night to you

Exit BREFFITT

GERALD Good night

ANABEL He's the last, apparently

GERALD We'll hope so

ANABEL He puts you in a fury

GERALD It's his manner My father spoilt them—abominable old limpets And they're so self-righteous They think I'm a sort of criminal who has instigated this new devilish system which runs everything so close and cuts it so fine—as if they hadn't made this inevitable by their shameless carelessness and wastefulness in the past He may well boast of his forty years—forty years' crass, stupid wastefulness

Two or three more clerks pass, talking till they approach the seat, then becoming silent after bidding good night

ANABEL But aren't you a bit sorry for them?

GERALD Why? If they're poor, what does it matter in a world of chaos?

ANABEL And aren't you an obstinate ass not to give them the bit they want It's mere stupid obstinacy

GERALD It may be I call it policy

ANABEL Men always do call their obstinacy policy

GERALD Well, I don't care what happens I wish things would come to a head I only fear they won't

ANABEL Aren't you rather wicked?—*Asking for strife?*

GERALD I hope I am It's quite a relief to me to feel that I may be wicked I fear I'm not I can see them all anticipating victory, in their low-down fashion wanting to crow their low-down crowings I'm afraid I feel it's a righteous cause, to cut a lot of little combs before I die

ANABEL But if they're in the right in what they want?

GERALD In the right—in the right!—They're just greedy, incompetent, stupid, gloating in a sense of the worst sort of power They're like vicious children, who would like to kill their parents so that they could have the run of the larder The rest is just cant

ANABEL If you're the parent in the case, I must say you flow over with loving-kindness for them

GERALD I don't—I detest them I only hope they will fight If they would, I'd have some respect for them But you'll see what it will be

ANABEL I wish I needn't, for it's very sickening

GERALD Sickening beyond expression

ANABEL I wish we could go right away

GERALD So do I—if one could get oneself out of this But one can't It's the same wherever you have industrialism—and you have industrialism everywhere, whether it's Timbuctoo or Paraguay or Antananarivo

ANABEL No, it isn't you exaggerate

JOB ARTHUR (*suddenly approaching from the other side*) Good evening, Mr Barlow I heard you were in here Could I have a word with you?

GERALD Get on with it, then

JOB ARTHUR Is it right that you won't meet the clerks?

GERALD Yes

JOB ARTHUR Not in any way?

GERALD Not in any way whatsoever

JOB ARTHUR But—I thought I understood from you the other night—

GERALD It's all the same what you understood

JOB ARTHUR Then you take it back, sir?

GERALD I take nothing back, because I gave nothing

JOB ARTHUR Oh, excuse me, excuse me, sir You said it would be alright about the clerks This lady heard you say it

GERALD Don't you call witnesses against me—Besides, what does it matter to you? What in the name of——

JOB ARTHUR Well, sir, you said it would be alright, and I went on that——

GERALD You went on that! Where did you go to?

JOB ARTHUR The men'll be out on Monday

GERALD So shall I

JOB ARTHUR Oh, yes, but—where's it going to end?

GERALD Do you want me to prophesy? When did I set up for a public prophet?

JOB ARTHUR I don't know, sir But perhaps you're doing more than you know There's a funny feeling just now among the men

GERALD So I've heard before Why should I concern myself with their feelings? Am I to cry when every collier bumps his funny-bone—or to laugh?

JOB ARTHUR It's no laughing matter, you see

GERALD And I'm sure it's no crying matter—unless you want to cry, do you see?

JOB ARTHUR Ah, but, very likely, it wouldn't be me who would cry—You don't know what might happen, now

GERALD I'm waiting for something to happen I should like something to happen—very much—very much indeed

JOB ARTHUR Yes, but perhaps you'd be sorry if it did happen

GERALD Is that a warning or a threat?

JOB ARTHUR I don't know—it might be a bit of both—What I mean to say——

GERALD (*suddenly seizing him by the scruff of the neck and shaking him*) What do you mean to say?—I mean you to say less, do you see?—a great deal less—do you see? You've run on with your saying long enough that clock had better run down So stop your sayings—stop your sayings, I tell you—or you'll have them shaken out of you—shaken out of you—shaken out of you, do you see? (*Suddenly flings him aside*)

JOB ARTHUR, *staggering, falls*

ANABEL Oh no!—oh, no!

GERALD Now get up, Job Arthur, and get up wiser than you went down You've played your little game and your little tricks and

We've had quite enough of strong men of your stamp, Job Arthur—quite enough—such Labour leaders as you

JOB ARTHUR You'll be sorry, Mr Barlow—you'll be sorry You'll wish you'd not attacked me

GERALD Don't you trouble about me and my sorrow Mind your own

JOB ARTHUR You will—you'll be sorry You'll be sorry for what you've done You'll wish you'd never begun this

GERALD Begun—begun?—I'd like to finish, too, that I would I'd like to finish with you, too—I warn you

JOB ARTHUR I warn you—I warn you You won't go on much longer Every parish has its own vermin

GERALD Vermin?

JOB ARTHUR Every parish has its own vermin, it lies with every parish to destroy its own We shan't have a clean parish till we've destroyed the vermin we've got

GERALD Vermin? The fool's raving Vermin!—Another phrase-maker, by God! Another phrase-maker to lead the people—Vermin? What vermin? I know quite well what I mean by vermin, Job Arthur But what do you mean? Vermin? Explain yourself

JOB ARTHUR Yes, vermin Vermin is what lives on other people's lives, living on their lives and profiting by it We've got 'em in every parish—vermin, I say—that live on the sweat and blood of the people—live on it, and get rich on it—get rich through living on other people's lives, the lives of the working men—living on the bodies of the working men—that's vermin—if it isn't, what is it? And every parish must destroy its own—every parish must destroy its own vermin

GERALD The phrase, my God! the phrase

JOB ARTHUR Phrase or no phrase, there it is, and face it out if you can There it is—there's not one in every parish—there's more than one—there's a number—

GERALD (*suddenly kicking him*) Go! (*Kicks him*) Go! (*Kicks him*)

Go! (*JOB ARTHUR falls*) Get out! (*Kicks him*) Get out, I say! Get out, I tell you! Get out! Get out!—Vermin!—Vermin!—I'll vermin you! I'll put my foot through your phrases Get up, I say, get up and go—go!

JOB ARTHUR It'll be you as'll go, this time

WILLIE Yes That's alright But how are you going to get on?

JOB ARTHUR Well—we've either got to throw the obstacle down the cliff—or walk over it

VOICES Ay—ay—ay—yes—that's a fact

WILLIE I quite follow you, Job Arthur You've either got to do for the masters—or else just remove them, and put them somewhere else

VOICES Ged rid on 'em—drop 'em down the shaft—sink 'em—ha' done wi' 'em—drop 'em down the shaft—bust the beggars—what do you do wi' vermin?

WILLIE Supposing you begin Supposing you take Gerald Barlow, and hang him up from this lamp-post, with a piece of coal in his mouth for a sacrament—

VOICES Ay—serve him right—serve the beggar right! Shove it down 's throttle—ay!

WILLIE Supposing you do it—supposing you've done it—and supposing you aren't caught and punished—even supposing that—what are you going to do next? *that's* the point

JOB ARTHUR We know what we're going to do Once we can get our hands free, we know what we're going to do

WILLIE Yes, so do I You're either going to make *such* a mess that we shall never get out of it—which I don't think you will do, for the English working man is the soul of obedience and order, and he'd behave himself to-morrow as if he was at Sunday school, no matter what he does to-day —No, what you'll do, Job Arthur, you'll set up another lot of masters, such a jolly sight worse than what we've got now I'd rather be mastered by Gerald Barlow, if it comes to mastering, than by Job Arthur Freer—oh, *such* a lot! You'll be far less free with Job Arthur for your boss than ever you were with Gerald Barlow You'll be far more degraded —In fact, though I've preached socialism in the market-place for thirty years—if you're going to start killing the masters to set yourselves up for bosses—why, kill me along with the masters For I'd rather die with somebody who has one tiny little spark of decency left—though it is a little tiny spark—than live to triumph with those that have none

VOICES Shut thy face, Houghton—shut it up—shut him up—hustle the beggar! Hoi!—hoi-ee!—whoo!—whoam-it, whoam-it!—

WILLIE And it's no use you making fools of yourselves—— (*His words are heard through an ugly, jeering, cold commotion*)

VOICE (*loudly*) He's comin'

VOICES Who?

VOICE Barlow —See 's motor?—comin' up—sithee?

WILLIE If you've any sense left—— (*Suddenly and violently disappears*)

VOICES Sorry!—he's comin'—'s comin'—sorry, ah! Who's in?—That's Turton drivin'—yi, he's behind wi' a woman—ah, he's comin'—he'll non go back—hold on Sorry!—wheer's 'e comin'?—up from Loddo—ay—— (*The cries die down—the motor car slowly comes into sight, OLIVER driving, GERALD and ANABEL behind The men stand in a mass in the way*)

OLIVER Mind yourself, there (*Laughter*)

GERALD Go ahead, Oliver

VOICE What's yer 'urry?

Crowd sways and surges on the car OLIVER is suddenly dragged out GERALD stands up—he, too, is seized from behind—he wrestles—is torn out of his great-coat—then falls—disappears Loud cries—"Hi!—hoi!—hoi-ee!" all the while The car shakes and presses uneasily

VOICE Stop the blazin' motor, somebody

VOICE Here y'are!—hold a minute (*A man jumps in and stops the engine—he drops in the driver's seat*)

COLLIER (*outside the car*) Step down, miss

ANABEL I am, Mrs Barlow

COLLIER Missis, then (*Laugh*) Step down—lead 'er forrard Take 'em forrard—take 'em forrard

JOB ARTHUR Ay, make a road

GERALD You're makin' a proper fool of yourself now, Freer

JOB ARTHUR You've brought it on yourself You've made fools of plenty of men

COLLIERS Come on, now—come on! Whoa!—whoa!—he's a jibber—go pretty now, go pretty!

VOICES (*suddenly*) Lay hold o' Houghton—nab 'im—seize 'im—rats!—rats!—bring 'im forrard!

ANABEL (*in a loud, clear voice*) I never knew anything so ridiculous

VOICES (*falsestto*) Ridiculous! Oh, ridiculous! Mind the step, dear!—I'm Mrs Barlow!—Oh, are you?—Tweet—tweet!

JOB ARTHUR Make a space, boys, make a space (*He stands with prisoners in a cleared space before the obelisk*) Now—now—quiet a minute—we want to ask a few questions of these gentlemen

VOICES Quiet!—quiet—Sh-h-h! Sh-h-h!—Answer pretty—answer pretty now!—Quiet!—Shh-h-h!

JOB ARTHUR We want to ask you, Mr Gerald Barlow, why you have given occasion for this present trouble?

GERALD You are a fool

VOICES Oh!—oh!—naughty Barlow!—naughty baa-lamb—answer pretty—answer pretty—be good baa-lamb—baa—baa!—answer pretty when gentleman asks you

JOB ARTHUR Quiet a bit Sh-h-h!—We put this plain question to you, Mr Barlow Why did you refuse to give the clerks this just and fair advance, when you knew that by refusing you would throw three thousand men out of employment?

GERALD You are a fool, I say

VOICES Oh!—oh!—won't do—won't do, Barlow—wrong answer—wrong answer—be good baa-lamb—naughty boy—naughty boy!

JOB ARTHUR Quiet a bit—now!—If three thousand men ask you a just, straightforward question, do you consider they've no right to an answer?

GERALD I would answer you with my foot

VOICES (*amid a threatening scuffle*) Da-di-da! Hark ye—hark ye! Oh—whoa—whoa a bit!—won't do!—won't do!—naughty—naughty—say you're sorry—say you're sorry—kneel and say you're sorry—kneel and beg pardon!

JOB ARTHUR Hold on a bit—keep clear!

VOICES Make him kneel—make him kneel—on his knees with him!

JOB ARTHUR I think you'd better kneel down

The crowd press on GERALD—he struggles—they hit him behind the knees, force him down

OLIVER This is shameful and unnecessary

VOICES All of 'em—on your knees—all of 'em—on their knees!

They seize OLIVER and WILLIE and ANABEL, hustling ANABEL kneels quietly—the others struggle

VOICES Shut up, Houghton—shut him up—squeeze him!

OLIVER Get off me—let me alone—I'll kneel

VOICES Good little doggies—nice doggies—kneel and beg pardon
—yap-yap—answer—make him answer!

JOB ARTHUR (*holding up his hand for silence*) It would be better
if you answered straight off, Barlow We want to know why you
prevented that advance?

VOICES (*after a pause*) Nip his neck! Make him yelp!

OLIVER Let me answer, then —Because it's worse, perhaps, to be
bullied by three thousand men than by one man

VOICES Oh!—oh!—dog keeps barking—stuff his mouth—stop him
up—here's a bit of paper—answer, Barlow—nip his neck—stuff
his mug—make him yelp—cork the bottle!

*They press a lump of newspaper into OLIVER'S mouth, and
bear down on GERALD*

JOB ARTHUR Quiet—quiet—quiet—a minute, everybody We give
him a minute—we give him a minute to answer

VOICES Give him a minute—a holy minute—say your prayers,
Barlow—you've got a minute—tick-tick, says the clock—time
him!

JOB ARTHUR Keep quiet

WILLIE Of all the damned, cowardly——

VOICES Sh-h-h!—Squeeze him—throttle him! Silence is golden,
Houghton—Close the shutters, Willie's dead—Dry up, wet-
whiskers!

JOB ARTHUR You've fifteen seconds

VOICES There's a long, long trail a-winding——

JOB ARTHUR The minute's up —We ask you again, Gerald Barlow,
why you refused a just and fair demand, when you know it was
against the wishes of three thousand men all as good as your-
self?

VOICES And a sight better—I don't think—we're not all vermin—
we're not all crawlers, living off the sweat of other folks—we're
not all parish vermin—parish vermin

JOB ARTHUR And on what grounds you think you have no occasion
to answer the straightforward question we put you here?

ANABEL (*after a pause*) Answer them, Gerald What's the use of
prolonging this?

GERALD I've nothing to answer

VOICES Nothing to answer—Gerald, darling—Gerald, duckie—oh, lovey-dovey—I've nothing to answer—no, by God—no, by God, he hasna—nowt to answer—ma'e him find summat, then—answer for him—g'e him 's answer—let him ha'e it—go on—mum—mum—lovey-dovey—rub his nose in it—kiss the dirt, ducky—bend him down—rub his nose in—he's saying something—oh no, he isn't—sorry I spoke—bend him down!

JOB ARTHUR Quiet a bit—quiet, everybody—he's got to answer—keep quiet—Now— (A silence) Now then, Barlow, will you answer, or won't you? (Silence)

ANABEL Answer them, Gerald—never mind

VOICES Sh-h-h! Sh-h-h! (Silence)

JOB ARTHUR You won't answer, Barlow?

VOICE Down the beggar!

VOICES Down him—put his nose down—flatten him!

*The crowd surges and begins to howl—they sway dangerously—*GERALD *is spread-eagled on the ground, face down*

JOB ARTHUR Back—back—back a minute—back—back! (They recoil)

WILLIE I hope there's a God in heaven

VOICES Put him down—flatten him!

WILLIE is flattened on the ground

JOB ARTHUR Now then—now then—if you won't answer, Barlow, I can't stand here for you any more—Take your feet off him, boys, and turn him over Turn him over—let us look at him Let us see if he can speak (They turn him over, with another scuffle) Now then, Barlow—you can see the sky above you Now do you think you're going to play with three thousand men, with their lives and with their souls?—now do you think you're going to answer them with your foot?—do you—do you?

The crowd has begun to sway and heave dangerously, with a low, muffled roar, above which is heard JOB ARTHUR'S *voice As he ceases, the roar breaks into a yell—the crowd heaves*

VOICES Down him—crack the vermin—on top of him—put your foot on the vermin!

ANABEL (with a loud, piercing cry, suddenly starting up) Ah no! Ah no! Ah-h-h-h no-o-o-o! Ah-h-h-h no-o-o-o! Ah-h-h-h no-o-o-o! No-o-o-o! No-o-o-o! No-o! No-o-o!—Ah-h-h-h!—it's enough, it's

enough, it's enough! It's enough—he's a man as you are He's a man as you are He's a man as you are He's a man as you are
(Weeps—a breath of silence)

OLIVER Let us stop now—let us stop now Let me stand up
(Silence) I want to stand up (A muffled noise)

VOICE Let him get up (OLIVER rises)

OLIVER Be quiet Be quiet—Now—choose! Choose! Choose!
Choose what you will do! Only choose! Choose!—it will be
irrevocable (A moment's pause) Thank God we haven't gone
too far—Gerald, get up (Men still hold him down)

JOB ARTHUR Isn't he to answer us? Isn't he going to answer
us?

OLIVER Yes, he shall answer you He shall answer you But let him
stand up No more of this Let him stand up He must stand up
(Men still hold GERALD down) (OLIVER takes hold of their hands
and removes them) Let go—let go now Yes, let go—yes—I ask
you to let go (Slowly, sullenly, the men let go GERALD is free,
but he does not move) There—get up, Gerald! Get up! You
aren't hurt, are you? You must get up—it's no use We're doing
our best—you must do yours When things are like this, we have
to put up with what we get (GERALD rises slowly and faces the
mob They roar dully) You ask why the clerks didn't get this
increase? Wait! Wait! Do you still wish for any answer, Mr
Freer?

JOB ARTHUR Yes, that's what we've been waiting for

OLIVER Then answer, Gerald

GERALD They've trodden on my face

OLIVER No matter Job Arthur will easily answer that you've
trodden on their souls Don't start an altercation (The crowd is
beginning to roar)

GERALD You want to know why the clerks didn't get their rise?—
Because you interfered and attempted to bully about it, do you
see That's why

VOICES You want bullying—You'll get bullying, you will

OLIVER Can't you see it's no good, either side? It's no mortal use
We might as well all die to-morrow, or to-day, or this minute,
as go on bullying one another, one side bullying the other side,
and the other side bullying back We'd better all die

WILLIE And a great deal better I'm damned if I'll take sides with

anybody against anything, after this If I'm to die, I'll die by myself As for living, it seems impossible

JOB ARTHUR Have the men nothing to be said for their side?

OLIVER They have a great deal—but not *everything*, you see

JOB ARTHUR Haven't they been wronged? And *aren't* they wronged?

OLIVER They have—and they are But haven't they been wrong themselves, too?—and aren't they wrong now?

JOB ARTHUR How?

OLIVER What about this affair? Do you call it right?

JOB ARTHUR Haven't we been driven to it?

OLIVER Partly And haven't you driven the masters to it, as well?

JOB ARTHUR I don't see that

OLIVER Can't you see that it takes two to make a quarrel? And as long as each party hangs on to its own end of the stick, and struggles to get full hold of the stick, the quarrel will continue It will continue till you've killed one another And even then, what better shall you be? What better would you be, really, if you'd killed Gerald Barlow just now? You wouldn't, you know We're all human beings, after all And why can't we try really to leave off struggling against one another, and set up a new state of things?

JOB ARTHUR That's all very well, you see, while you've got the goods

OLIVER I've got very little, I assure you

JOB ARTHUR Well, if you haven't, those you mix with have They've got the money, and the power, and they intend to keep it

OLIVER As for power, somebody must have it, you know It only rests with you to put it into the hands of the best men, the men you *really* believe in —And as for money, it's life, it's living that matters, not simply having money

JOB ARTHUR You can't live without money

OLIVER I know that And therefore why can't we have the decency to agree simply about money—just agree to dispose of it so that all men could live their own lives

JOB ARTHUR That's what we want to do But the others, such as Gerald Barlow, they keep the money—and the power

OLIVER You see, if you wanted to arrange things so that money

flowed more naturally, so that it flowed naturally to every man, according to his needs, I think we could all soon agree. But you don't. What you want is to take it away from one set and give it to another—or keep it yourselves.

JOB ARTHUR We want every man to have his proper share.

OLIVER I'm sure I do. I want every man to be able to live and be free. But we shall never manage it by fighting over the money. If you want what is natural and good, I'm sure the owners would soon agree with you.

JOB ARTHUR What? Gerald Barlow agree with us?

OLIVER Why not? I believe so.

JOB ARTHUR You ask him.

OLIVER Do you think, Gerald, that if the men really wanted a whole, better way, you would agree with them?

GERALD I want a better way myself—but not their way.

JOB ARTHUR There, you see!

VOICES Ah-h! look you!—That's him—that's him all over.

OLIVER You want a better way,—but not his way. He wants a better way—but not your way. Why can't you both drop your buts, and simply say you want a better way, and believe yourselves and one another when you say it? Why can't you?

GERALD Look here! I'm quite as tired of my way of life as you are of yours. If you make me believe you want something better, then I assure you I do. I want what you want. But Job Arthur Freer's not the man to lead you to anything better. You can tell what people want by the leaders they choose, do you see? You choose leaders whom I respect, and I'll respect you, do you see? As it is, I don't. And now I'm going.

VOICES Who says?—Oh ay!—Who says goin'?

GERALD Yes, I'm going. About this affair here we'll cry quits, no more said about it. About a new way of life, a better way all round—I tell you I want it and need it as much as ever you do. I don't care about money really. But I'm never going to be bullied.

VOICE Who doesn't care about money?

GERALD I don't. I think we ought to be able to alter the whole system—but not by bullying, not because one lot wants what the other has got.

CHARACTERS

MRS HEMSTOCK
NURSE BROADBANKS
MR HEMSTOCK
HARRY HEMSTOCK
BARON RUDOLF VON RUGE
THE BAKER, JOB ARTHUR BOWERS
MRS SUSY SMALLEY
DR FOULES
RACHEL WILCOX
BARONESS VON RUGE
MR WILCOX

ACT I

SCENE I *Downstairs front room of the Hemstocks' cottage*
SCENE II *Kitchen of the Hemstocks' house*

ACT II

SCENE I *The same*
SCENE II *Kitchen of the Hemstocks' house*

ACT III

SCENE I *The dining-room at the vicarage*
SCENE II *Nurse's room at the miner's cottage*

ACT IV

SCENE I *Kitchen of the Hemstocks' house*

ACT V

SCENE I *Porch of the Grunston church*
SCENE II *Beside the vicarage garden walk*
SCENE III *Porch of the Grunston church*

ACT I

SCENE I

The downstairs front room of a moderate-sized cottage There is a wide fireplace, with a heaped-up ashy fire The parlour is used as a bedroom, and contains a heavy old-fashioned mahogany dressing-table, a washstand, and a bedstead whose canopy is missing, so that the handsome posts stand like ruined columns The room is in an untidy, neglected condition, medicine bottles and sickroom paraphernalia littered about In the bed, a woman between sixty and seventy, with a large-boned face, and a long plait of fine dark hair Enter the parish NURSE, in uniform, but without cloak and bonnet She is a well-built woman of some thirty years, smooth-haired, pale, soothing in manner

MRS HEMSTOCK Eh, Nurse, I'm glad to see thee I *han* been motherless while thou's been away

NURSE Haven't they looked after you, Mrs Hemstock?

MRS HEMSTOCK They hanna, Nurse Here I lie, day in, day out, like a beetle on my back, an' not a soul comes nigh me, saving th' Mester, when 'e's forced An' 'im (*She points to mirror of dressing-table*)

NURSE Who is that, Mrs Hemstock?

MRS HEMSTOCK Canna ter see 'im? That little fat chap as stands there laughing at me

NURSE There's no little fat chap, Mrs Hemstock

MRS HEMSTOCK There is an' ' He's bobbing a' thee now

NURSE, who has been rolling up her sleeves, showing a fine white arm, throws her rolled cuffs at the mirror

NURSE Then we'll send him away

MRS HEMSTOCK Nay, dunna thee huft him 'E's nowt but a little chap'

NURSE I'll wash you, shall I?

MRS HEMSTOCK Tha nedna but gi' me a catlick I'm as snug as a bug in a rug

NURSE (*laughing*) Very well

She goes into the kitchen

MRS HEMSTOCK (*calling*) Who's in there, Nurse?

NURSE There's nobody, Mrs Hemstock

MRS HEMSTOCK I bet he's gallivanting off after some woman

NURSE (*calling*) Who?

MRS HEMSTOCK Why, our Mester 'E's a ronk 'un, I can tell you
'As our Harry done it?

NURSE Done what, Mrs Hemstock?

MRS HEMSTOCK Cut 'is throat 'E's allers threatenin'!

NURSE (*entering with a jug of hot water*) What! You're not serious, Mrs Hemstock

MRS HEMSTOCK Aren't I? But I am An' 'e'll do it one o' these days,
if 'e's not a'ready I 'avena clapped eyes on him for five days

NURSE How is that?

MRS HEMSTOCK Eh, dunna ax me 'E niver comes in if 'e can 'elp
it

NURSE How strange! Why is it, do you think?

MRS HEMSTOCK Summat's gen 'im mulligurles 'E'll not live long

NURSE What! Harry? He's quite young, and has nothing the
matter, has he?

MRS HEMSTOCK You know, Nurse, I 'as a fish inside me I woi like
Jonah back'ards I used ter feel it floppin' about in my inside like
a good 'un, an' nobody'd get it out——

NURSE But Harry hasn't got a fish in his inside——

MRS HEMSTOCK 'E 'asna—but I believe 'e's got a leech

NURSE Oh!

MRS HEMSTOCK Dunna thee wet my 'air, Nurse—it ma'es it go
grey

NURSE (*smiling*) Very well, I'll be careful But what makes you
say Harry has a leech in his inside?

MRS HEMSTOCK On 'is 'eart 'Asn't ter noticed 'e gets as white-faced
as a flat fish? It's that

NURSE Oh, and did he swallow it?

MRS HEMSTOCK 'E didna, 'E bred it like a mackerel's head breeds
maggots

NURSE How dreadful!

MRS HEMSTOCK When you've owt up with you, you allers breed
summat

NURSE And what was up with Mr Hemstock?

MRS HEMSTOCK With our Mester?

NURSE With Harry

MRS HEMSTOCK You knowed, didna you, as 'e'd had ructions wi' Rachel Wilcox?

NURSE No

MRS HEMSTOCK Oh, yes 'E fell off 'is bike eighteen month sin', a'most into her lap, an' 'er's been sick for 'im ever sin'

NURSE But he didn't care for her?

MRS HEMSTOCK I dunno 'E went out wi' 'er for about twelve month—but 'e never wanted 'er 'E's funny, an' allers 'as been

NURSE Rather churlish?

MRS HEMSTOCK No—'e wor allers one o' the' lovin' sor' when 'e wor but a lad, 'd follow me about, and "mammy" me

NURSE But he got into bad ways—

MRS HEMSTOCK Well, I got sick of him stormin' about like a cat lookin' for her kittens, so I hustled him out 'E began drinkin' a bit, an' carryin' on I thought 'e wor goin' to be like his father for women But 'e wor allers a mother's lad—an' Rachel Wilcox cured him o' women

NURSE She's not a nice girl

MRS HEMSTOCK 'E'd only ter stick 'is 'ead out of the door an' 'er'd run like a pig as 'ears the bucket 'Er wor like a cat foriver slidin', rubbin' 'erself against him

NURSE How dreadful!

MRS HEMSTOCK But I encouraged 'er I thought 'e wor such a soft 'un, at 'is age, a man of thirty!

NURSE Was he always quiet?

MRS HEMSTOCK Eh, bless you 'E'd talk the leg off an non pot, once on a day But now, it's like pottering to get a penny out of a money box afore you ca get a word from 'im edgeways

NURSE And he won't come to see you

MRS HEMSTOCK Not him! 'E once had a rabbit what got consumption, an' 'e wouldn't kill it, nor let me, neither would he go near it, so it died of starvation, an' 'e throwed a hammer at me for telling him so You see—harsh! That's our Mester

NURSE Yes Do I hurt you? They've let your hair get very cattered

MRS HEMSTOCK Get it out, Nurse—never mind me

Enter MR HEMSTOCK, a very white-haired old man, clean-shaven, with brown eyes There is a certain courtliness in his quiet bearing

MR HEMSTOCK I'm glad to see you back, Nurse—very glad (*He bows by instinct*)

NURSE Thank you, Mr Hemstock I'm pleased to see you again

MRS HEMSTOCK (*to her husband*) Tha'rt not 'alf as glad to see her as I am 'Ere I lie from hour to hour, an' niver a sound but cows rumblin' and cocks shoutin' An' where dost reckon tha's been? Tha's been slivin' somewhere like a tomcat, ever sin' breakfast

MR HEMSTOCK (*to NURSE*) I've been gone ten minutes (*To his wife*) I've on'y been for a penn'orth of barm ter ma'e thee some barm dumplings

MRS HEMSTOCK An' wheer's our Harry?

MR HEMSTOCK He's in garden, diggin'

MRS HEMSTOCK What are ter out o' breath wi'?

MR HEMSTOCK I've been runnin' our Susy's kids They was drivin' our fowls again

MRS HEMSTOCK Tha shouldna ha' wanted ter come here, a mile away from anybody but our Susy

NURSE It is rather lonely—only Mrs Smalley's farm and your cottage And the children *are* rather wild

MR HEMSTOCK Let me live in a street What does colliers want livin' in country cottages, wi' nowt but fowls an' things shoutin' at you or takin' no notice of you, as if you was not there?

MR HEMSTOCK (*to NURSE*) We came for the garden

NURSE I suppose you are still on strike

MR HEMSTOCK There's talk of settlement I see they're opening some of the pits. But I've done, you know,

NURSE Of course you have, Mr Hemstock Harry will be glad to begin, though

MR HEMSTOCK I'm afraid whether 'e'll get a job You see—

MRS HEMSTOCK What hast got for dinner?

MR HEMSTOCK Roast pork, rushes, barm dumplings

MRS HEMSTOCK Then lock 'slippy about gettin' it ready I'm clammin' Ha' thy heels crack

MR HEMSTOCK (*to NURSE*) You wouldn't think she'd been bed-fast thirteen month, would you?

MRS HEMSTOCK Tha nedna ha'e none o' thy nalaver wi' Nurse.

Nurse, ta'e no notice o' a word 'e says (HEMSTOCK goes out)
MRS HEMSTOCK He's a good cook, and that's all you can say for him

NURSE I think he's very good to you, Mrs Hemstock

MRS HEMSTOCK He's too busy runnin' after a parcel o' women to be good to me

NURSE If all men were as good—

MRS HEMSTOCK Tha's niver had him to put up wi' Tha's niver been married, 'as ter?

NURSE No, Mrs Hemstock

MRS HEMSTOCK A man's fair enough to you' face—if 'e's not as fow as a jackass, but let you' back be turned, an' you no more know what's in his breeches an' waistcoat than if 'e wor another man

NURSE Oh, Mrs Hemstock!

MRS HEMSTOCK Yes, an' tha'll "oh" when tha knows

NURSE I'm sure you're getting tired Won't you have your bed made?

MRS HEMSTOCK Sin' it's gone that long, it might easy go a bit longer

NURSE Why, when was it made last?

MRS HEMSTOCK How long has thee been gone away?

NURSE Three weeks

MRS HEMSTOCK Then it's that long

NURSE Oh, what a shame! Wouldn't Mrs Smalley do it?

MRS HEMSTOCK Our Susy! 'Er'd better not show 'er face inside that door

NURSE What a pity she's so quarrelsome! But you will have it made?

MRS HEMSTOCK I know tha'll whittle me to death if I dunna Does tha like roast pork?

NURSE Fairly Now, shall I lift you onto the couch?

MRS HEMSTOCK No, tha wunna I want na droppin' an' smashin' like a pot I'm nowt but noggins o' bone, like iron bars in a paper bag Eh, if I wor but the staunch fourteen stone I used to be

NURSE You've been a big woman

MRS HEMSTOCK I could ha' shadowed thee an' left plenty to spare How heavy are ter, Nurse?

He comes forward NURSE wraps Mrs Hemstock in a quilt

MRS HEMSTOCK *„To think as I should be crippled like this'*

NURSE Yes, it is dreadful

HARRY lifts his mother—NURSE showing him how

MRS HEMSTOCK *Tha's got fingers like gre't tree-roots*

NURSE shows him how to place his hands Then she lifts the trailing quilt and follows him to the couch

MRS HEMSTOCK *(rather faintly)* I canna abide to feel a man's arms shiverin' agen me It ma'es me feel like a tallywag post hummin'

NURSE There, be still—you are upset I'm sure Mr Hemstock did it gently

She stoops and strokes Patty, who is crouched near the bed
HARRY moves as if to go

Will you fetch clean sheets and pillow slips—be quick, will you?

HARRY goes out NURSE begins to make the bed

MRS HEMSTOCK Isna 'e like that there goose, now?

NURSE Well, I'm sure Patty's a very lovable creature

MRS HEMSTOCK I'm glad tha thinks so It's not many as can find in their heart to love a gaby like that

NURSE Poor Patty!

MRS HEMSTOCK An' that other hussy on'y wants him cause she canna get him

NURSE It's often the case

MRS HEMSTOCK It is wi' a woman who's that cunning at kissin' an' cuddlin' that a man 'ud run after 'er a hundred miles for the same again

NURSE Is she clever, then?

MRS HEMSTOCK She melts herself into a man like butter in a hot tater She ma'es him feel like a pearl button swimmin' away in hot vinegar That's what I made out from 'im

NURSE She's not a nice girl

MRS HEMSTOCK An' 'e hated her cause I shoved him at her

NURSE But you don't care for her, surely

MRS HEMSTOCK Canna bear her A pussy cat always rubbin' 'erself agen a man's legs—an' one o' the quiet sort But for all that, I should like to see him married afore I die I dunna like, Nurse, leavin' 'im like 'e is 'E wor my darlin'

NURSE *(softly)* Yes

MRS HEMSTOCK An' 'e niver wor a drunkard, but 'e's the makin's of one

NURSE Surely not—oh, how dreadful!

Enter HARRY with bedding He helps NURSE shake up and make the bed

NURSE How sweet the sheets are! They were aired on the currant bushes Did Mrs Smalley wash them?

MRS HEMSTOCK Our Susy! Not likely She'd never do a hand's turn I expect our Harry there weshed 'em—an' 'is father Dunna look so, cannà ter answer a bit of a question? (*He does not answer*) 'E looks as if 'e'd swallowed a year o' foul weather

NURSE Hem at the top (*She stumbles over Patty*) Oh, poor Patty—poor old bird! Come here then, you dear old thing—did I hurt you?

MRS HEMSTOCK Tha's more fondness for that goose than I han,

Nurse It's too much like him Birds of a feather flock together

NURSE You include me

MRS HEMSTOCK If tha likes

NURSE It's not a compliment

MRS HEMSTOCK It isna Tha'rt a lady, an' han a lady's time, an' tha'rt a fool if tha changes

NURSE I am not so sure——

MRS HEMSTOCK Tha gets a good wage, an' th' minute tha enters a house everybody gets up to run about after thee What more dost want?

NURSE I don't know

MRS HEMSTOCK No, I s'd think tha doesna

NURSE Sometimes I get tired, and then—I wish—I wish I'd somebody to fad after me a bit I nurse so many people, and——

MRS HEMSTOCK Tha'd like nursin' thysen Eh, bless you, a man's knee's a chair as is soon worn out

NURSE It's not that—I should like a home of my own, where I could be private There's a lonely corner in most of us that not all the *friends* in the world can fill up——

MRS HEMSTOCK And a husband only changes a lonely corner into a lonely house

NURSE Perhaps so But I should like to be able to shut my own doors, and shut all the world out, and be at home, quiet, comfortable

MRS HEMSTOCK You'd find you shut the door to stop folks hearing you crying

NURSE (*bending down and stroking Patty*) Perhaps so

MRS HEMSTOCK 'Tha art fond 'o' that bird

NURSE (*flushing*) I am

MRS HEMSTOCK If I wor thee, our Harry, I wouldna let Patty beat me, even

HARRY What dost mean?

MRS HEMSTOCK Stroke him, Nurse—and say "Poor old Harry"

NURSE Mr Hemstock will have a grudge against me if you slate him so in my presence

MRS HEMSTOCK And would it grieve thee?

NURSE I should be sorry

MRS HEMSTOCK (*after a pause—vehemently*) Ha, if he worn't such a slow fool! Can thee lift me back, Nurse?

NURSE Won't you let Mr Hemstock——?

MRS HEMSTOCK No—thee do it

Exit HARRY

Did ter niver ha'e a sweetheart, Nurse?

NURSE Yes—when I was in the hospital He was a doctor

MRS HEMSTOCK An' where is he?

NURSE He was too good for me, his mother said, and so——

MRS HEMSTOCK Tha'rt well rid o' such a draggletail How long is it since?

NURSE Eight years

MRS HEMSTOCK Oh, so tha'rt none heartbroken We'n got a new assistant I like him better than the owd doctor His name's Foules

NURSE What!

CURTAIN

SCENE II

Time the same The kitchen of HEMSTOCK'S house, a large, low, old-fashioned room Fowls are pecking on the floor HARRY, in a coarse apron, is washing the floor MR HEMSTOCK, at the table, is mixing flour in a bowl

MR HEMSTOCK Who wor that scraightin' a bit sin'?

HARRY Our Susy's kid

MR HEMSTOCK What for?

HARRY I fetched him a wipe across th' mouth

MR HEMSTOCK There's more bother then——

HARRY He was settin' that dog on th' fowls again

MR HEMSTOCK We s'll be having her round in a tear, directly,
then

HARRY Well, I'm not——

*There is a knock and in the open doorway at the back a
little, withered, old clergyman, the BARON, is seen*

BARON How is the sick woman this morning? (*He speaks with
a very foreign German accent*)

MR HEMSTOCK I think she's middlin', thank you

BARON I will go and see her, and speak to her

HARRY We've told you a dozen times 'er na wants you

BARON It is my duty that I shall go——

HARRY (*rising from his knees*) Tha are na——!

BARON I am the vicar of this parish I am the Baron von Ruge
I will do my duty——

HARRY (*confronting him*) Tha'rt na goin' to bother her Her na
wants thee

BARON Stand clear of my way, sir—I will go, I will not be barred,
I will go to her, I will remind her——

HARRY (*frustrating his efforts*) 'Er na wants thee——

*He suddenly moves the BARON rushes into Patty The goose
flaps and squawks and attacks him The BARON retreats hastily
Enter NURSE*

NURSE Whatever is the matter?

MR HEMSTOCK It's Patty haulin' the Baron out

NURSE Oh dear—how dreadful!

MR HEMSTOCK 'E's bin plenty of times, an' every time our Harry
tells 'im as Missis won't be bothered wi' him——

NURSE What a pity she won't see him Don't you think if you
let him go——

HARRY Ask 'er thysen if 'er wants 'im, an' if 'er doesna want
'im, 'e's na goin'——

NURSE But what a pity!

MR HEMSTOCK You can't make heads or tails of what 'e says I

can't think what they want wi' a bit of a German Baron bein' a vicar in England—in *this* countiy an' a', where there wants a bluff man

NURSE He's a Polish noblema'n, Mr Hemstock, exiled after fighting for his country He's a brave man, and a good gentleman I like him very much

MR HEMSTOCK He treats you as if you was dirt, an' talks like a chokin' cock——

HARRY An' 'e's na goin' pesterin' 'er when 'er doesna want 'im

NURSE Well, of course you know best—but don't you think Mrs Hemstock ought to see a minister? I think——

Enter the BAKER, a big, stout, pale man of about forty

BAKER Been havin' a shindy with the Baron?

MR HEMSTOCK He wants to see the Missis, an' we not let him

BAKER You'd best keep th' right side of 'im (*He swings his large basket, which he carries sackwise on his shoulder, down to a chair*) The strike is settled, an' th' men's goin' back on the old terms

NURSE Oh, I'm so glad

BAKER Fisher's a deep 'un The Company'll know yet as they've got a manager

NURSE (*to HARRY*) So you'll be going back to work soon, Mr Hemstock You will be glad

MR HEMSTOCK Me—I s'll never work again An' it's doubtful as our Harry won't get on——

BAKER They gave you a place before the strike, didn't they, where you had to work you inside out for about fifteen shillings a week?

HARRY Ha

He goes out

MR HEMSTOCK Yes, they treated him very shabbily

BAKER I bet it was th' owd Baron He's a good hand at having your eye for a word, an' your tooth for a look I bet Harry'll get no job——

MR HEMSTOCK No, I'm afraid 'e wunna The Baron will go down to Fisher——

BAKER And Harry can go down to—his godfather, eh, Nurse?

NURSE I don't understand

BAKER *Old Harry*

MR HEMSTOCK I hope to goodness 'e will get something to do, else 'e'll mope himself into the cut, or the 'sylum, afore long

BAKER Oh, it's love what's upset him, isn't it? Rachel Wilcox was too much for his stomach——

MR HEMSTOCK I dunno what it is

BAKER She's a bit of a ronk 'un She was his first cigar, an' it's left him sick yet She's not half bad, you know, if you can stand 'em strong

NURSE *goes out*

I've scared Nurse off——But Harry's got a bit of a thin stomach, hasn't he? Rachel's not a half bad little ha-p'orth

MR HEMSTOCK Some's got a stomach for tan-tafflins, an' some 'ud rather ha'e bread an' butter——

BAKER And Rachel's creamy——she's a cream horn of plenty——eh, what?

MR HEMSTOCK A bit sickly

BAKER I dunno——it 'ud take a lot o' rich food to turn me How many——?

MR HEMSTOCK One of yesterday's bakin', please

BAKER *sets the loaf on the table*

BAKER Your Susy wa'nt in——I wonder what she wants Where is she, do you know?

MR HEMSTOCK She'll be somewhere lookin' after th' land

BAKER I reckon she makes a rare farmer

MR HEMSTOCK Yes

BAKER Bill left the place in a bit of a mess——

MR HEMSTOCK A man as drinks himself to death

BAKER Ay! She wishes she'd had me astead of him, she says I tell her it's never too late to mend He's made the hole, I'll be the patch But it's not much of a place, Smalley's farm——?

MR HEMSTOCK It takes her all her time to manage an' pay off Bill's debts

BAKER Debts——why, I thought from what she said——

Enter SUSY SMALLEY, a buxom, ruddy, bold woman of thirty-five, wearing thick boots and a dark blue milkmaid bonnet

MRS SMALLEY Wheer's our Harry?

MR HEMSTOCK I dunno 'E went out a bit sin'

MRS SMALLEY An' wheer is 'e? I'll let him know whether he's——

Enter HARRY

Oh, I've foun^d thee, have I? What dost reckon tha's been doin' to my lad?

HARRY Tha nedna ha' hunted for me I wor nobbut i' th' garden

BAKER You should ha' looked in th' parsley bed, Susy

MRS SMALLEY That's wheer to find *babies*—an' I'll baby him What did thee hit my lad for?

HARRY Ask thysen

MRS SMALLEY I'm axin' thee Tha thinks because I hanna a man to stand up for me, tha can——

HARRY There's a lot o' helpless widder about thee!

MRS SMALLEY No, an' it's a good thing I'm not helpless, else I should be trod underfoot like straw, by a parcel of——

HARRY It's tha as does th' treadin' Tha's trod your Bill a long way underfoot—six foot or more

BAKER It's a fat sight deeper than that afore you get to blazes

MRS SMALLEY Whatever our Bill was or wan't, 'e was not a' idle skilk livin' on two old folks, devourin' 'em

NURSE (*entering*) Oh, think of your mother, Mrs Smalley

MRS SMALLFY I s'll think of who I like——

BAKER An' who *do* you like, Susy?

MRS SMALLEY You keep your "Susy" to yourself——

BAKER Only too glad, when I get her——

MRS SMALLEY An' we don't thank Nurse Broadbanks for interferin' *She* only comes carneyin' round for what *she* gets Our Harry an' her's matched, a pair of mealy-mouthed creeps, deep as they make 'em An' my father's not much better What all of 'em's after's my mother's money

NURSE Oh, for shame, for shame!

HARRY Shut thy mouth, or I'll shut it for thee

MRS SMALLEY Oh, shall you? I should like to see you It's as much as you durst do to hit a child, you great coward, you kid

MR HEMSTOCK Shut it up, *now*, shut it up!

MRS SMALLEY But I'll let him know, if he touches my child again, I'll give him what for I'll thrash him myself

BAKER That's your brother, not your husband

MRS SMALLEY I will an' a' Him an' his blessed fowls! 'E's nobbut

a chuck himself, as dursn't say boh to a goose, an' as hides in th' water-butt if his girl comes to see him——

HARRY *dashes forward as if to strike her* The BAKER *interposes*

BAKER Here, none o' that, none o' that!

MRS SMALLEY A great coward! He thinks he'll show Nurse Broadbanks what he is, does he? I hope she'll storm round him after this bit

HARRY (*in a fury*) If tha doesn't——

MR HEMSTOCK Let's have no more of it, let's have no more of it——

BAKER How much bread, Mrs Smalley? I reckon your Bill bettered himself when he flitted—what? I *don't* think How many loaves? I saved you a crusty one

MR HEMSTOCK She's crust enough on her——

BAKER Oh, I like 'em a bit brown Good morning, everybody
He swings up his basket and follows MRS SMALLEY *out*

NURSE How shameful to make a disturbance like that!

MR HEMSTOCK We never have a bit of peace She won't do a hand's turn in the house, and seems as if she can't bear herself because we manage without her

HARRY She's after the money

NURSE How dreadful! You are a strange family

She goes into the parlour again, and keeps coming in and out with water ewer and so on MR HEMSTOCK *flourishes his balls of dough* HARRY *puts on the saucepan*

MR HEMSTOCK Dost think Job Arthur will marry our Susy?

HARRY No

MR HEMSTOCK He seems to hang round her a good bit Your mother often says he lets his bread get stale stoppin' there

HARRY If 'e married 'er, 'e'll settle her

MR HEMSTOCK Yes—he's all there

HARRY All but what he's short to pay his debts

He goes out

NURSE I think I've done everything, Mr Hemstock

She begins packing her black bag

MR HEMSTOCK Could you wait half a minute while I go—to Goddard's?

NURSE Well—ten minutes

NURSE Not on my own behalf, Doctor

DR FOULES On mine, Nurse?

NURSE (*reluctantly*) No, not quite that

DR FOULES *Tædium vitæ*—all unresolved emotions and sicknesses go under that “weariness of life”

NURSE Life? Doctor—do we get enough life to be weary of it? Work, perhaps

DR FOULES It may be—but——

NURSE You don’t want life

DR FOULES (*smiling*) Not much I see too much of it to want it

NURSE Your mother will, I hope, live long enough to save you from experience

DR FOULES I hope it is a good wish, Nurse

NURSE Do you doubt it?

DR FOULES Will you come and see us, Nurse?

NURSE And see your mother?

DR FOULES And see my mother, Nurse (*He bows*)

NURSE (*smiling*) Thank you—I will

Enter HARRY—he stands rather confused in the doorway

DR FOULES Good morning, Mr Hemstock How is Mrs Hemstock this morning?

HARRY ‘Er’s pretty middlin’, I believe

Enter MR HEMSTOCK

DR FOULES I have just discovered that Nurse and I are old friends

MR HEMSTOCK I am glad of that——

DR FOULES Thank you

NURSE Dr Foules used to be my sweetheart

MR HEMSTOCK You don’t mean it!

DR FOULES Is it so long ago, Nurse, that you jest about it?

NURSE I do not jest, Doctor You are always to be taken very seriously

DR FOULES (*bowing*) Thank you

NURSE (*to HARRY*) Where did I leave my galoshes, Mr Hemstock?

HARRY I’ll fetch ‘em

He brings them in

NURSE How good of you to clean them for me!

They all stand watching while NURSE pulls them on

DR FOULES “A world full of friends” Nurse

NURSE Mr Hemstock and I are very good friends—are we not, Mr Hemstock?

HARRY I dinna know—you know best—'appen we are

DR FOULES You are repudiated, Nurse

NURSE Twice! You shouldn't have begun it

DR FOULES I am very sorry It is never too late to mend

NURSE We've heard that before this morning I must go

DR FOULES You will come and see us—soon

NURSE I am at your disposal, Doctor Good day, everybody

ALL Good day, Nurse

DR FOULES Well, I will see how Mrs Hemstock is

He goes out

MR HEMSTOCK He's a nice fellow

HARRY Hm!

MR HEMSTOCK Fancy he used ter court Nurse! I shouldna be surprised if they got together again

HARRY It doesna matter to me whether 'er does or not

MR HEMSTOCK No, it na matters to us—on'y I should like to see her settled wi' a decent chap She's a good woman for any man If I'd a been thy age—

HARRY Wi' that other hangin' round—an' no work to do—tha's ha' done wonders

MR HEMSTOCK T'other—tha's gin 'er the sack—an' tha can get work elsewhere

HARRY Dost think 'er'd ha'e me! *(He laughs contemptuously)*

There is a noise of yelping and crying The men stand and listen

MR HEMSTOCK It's that dog!—An' Nurse!

HARRY rushes out There is a great yelping and ki-yi-ing, a scream from NURSE Immediately NURSE enters, carrying Patty, who flaps in a torn and gory state HARRY follows NURSE, panting, sets down Patty

MR HEMSTOCK Whatever—

HARRY *(flushing in fury)* Has it hurt thee—did it touch thee?

NURSE Me!

HARRY I'll break its neck

NURSE Oh—don't be—

HARRY Where did it touch thee? There's blood on thee

NURSE It's not me, it's Patty

HARRY 'Appen tha non knows—'appen it caught thee Look at thy arm—look there'

NURSE No—I'm not hurt, I'm sure I'm not

HARRY I'll break its neck, the brute

NURSE It had got hold of poor Patty by the wing—poor old bird

HARRY Look at thy cuffs I'll break its neck

NURSE No—oh no, don't go out—no—get me some warm water, will you—and I'll see to Patty

HARRY *brings a bowl of warm water* NURSE *takes bandaging from her bag*

MR HEMSTOCK It's been at her before

NURSE (to HARRY) You look after her other wing—keep her still—poor old bird—*(She proceeds to dress the wounded wing)*

MR HEMSTOCK She'd be alright, Nurse, without you bothering

NURSE The idea—poor old thing'

MR HEMSTOCK We've been many time worse hurt at pit, an' not half that attention

NURSE But—you see, you're not geese

HARRY We're not of as much count

NURSE Hand me the scissors, please—you don't know what you are——

DR FOULES *enters and stands in doorway*

MR HEMSTOCK I keep telling him, if he set more stock by himself other folks 'ud think better of him

NURSE They might know him a little better if he'd let them

DR FOULES I see my help is superfluous

NURSE Yes, Doctor—it's one of the lower animals

DR FOULES Ah——

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE I

*The same evening The HEMSTOCKS' kitchen, with the lamp lighted
The BAKER and HARRY sit with glasses of whisky*

BAKER An' tha doesn't want 'er?

HARRY I heave at the sight of her

BAKER She'll ha'e a bit o' money, I reckon

HARRY She's got to wait till old Hezekiah cops out, first

BAKER Hm! That'll be a long time yet—if he doesn't get married
again They say he's hankerin' after Nurse

HARRY 'Er'll niver ha'e 'im

BAKER Too old But what hast got against Rachel?

HARRY Nowt—but I heave wi' sickness at the thought of 'er

BAKER Hm! I like one as'll give as much as she takes

HARRY Sight more

BAKER It depends who's who

HARRY I can never make out why she went in service at the
vicarage

BAKER Can't you? I've had many a nice evening up there Baron
an' Baroness go to bed at nine o'clock and then— Oh, all the
girls know the advantage of being at the vicarage

HARRY Oh—an' does she ha'e thee up in the kitchen?

BAKER Does she not half

HARRY I thought she wor so much struck on me!

BAKER You wait a minute If she can't feed 1' th' paddock she'll
feed at th' roadside Not but what she's all right, you know

HARRY I do know

BAKER She's not got the spirit of your Susy By Jove, *she's* a terror
No liberties there

HARRY Not likely

BAKER They say Bill left 'er in debt

HARRY He did

BAKER Hm! She'll have a long pull, then, to get it paid off

HARRY She's a-waitin' for my mother's money

BAKER Is she likely to get much?

HARRY Happen a couple o' hundred—happen nowt

BAKER Depend on the will?

HARRY Yes

BAKER A couple of hundred

HARRY About that apiece, we should ha'e

BAKER Hm! You've seen the will?

HARRY No—my mother takes good care o' that

BAKER Then none of you know? But you've some idea

HARRY We hanna My mother's funny—there's no tellin' what 'er might do

BAKER Hm! She might leave the money away from her own children?

HARRY I shouldna be a bit surprised

BAKER Hm! An' your Susy——

MRS SMALLEY (*entering*) What about your Susy?

BAKER Hello!

MRS SMALLEY You're stoppin' a precious long time Where might you be bound to-night?

BAKER Not far

MRS SMALLEY No further than the vicarage, an' that's two closes off But Rachel'll be givin' you up

BAKER 'Appen so

MRS SMALLEY Then she'll be tryin' her chances down here

BAKER I wish her luck

HARRY (*going out*) I'll go an' get a bit o' bacca

MRS SMALLEY An' what do you call luck?

BAKER Which do you reckon is a lucky-bag, me or your Harry?

MRS SMALLEY You're both about as good he's only got a little bunged-up whistle in him, an' many a hand's ferreted in you an' fetched out what's worth havin'

BAKER So I'm not worth havin'?

MRS SMALLEY No, you're not, that's flat

BAKER So you wouldn't have me?

MRS SMALLEY You're giving yourself away, are you?

BAKER (*incisively*) No, I'm not

MRS SMALLEY Indeed And what's your figure, may I ask?

BAKER A couple of hundred, to you, to anyone else, more

MRS SMALLEY Thank you for the offer—very kind of you, I'm sure
And how much is it to Rachel?

BAKER Two hundred an' fifty

MRS SMALLEY Oh! So I'm worth fifty pound to you, am I—*after*
I've put my two hundred down Ready money?

BAKER Six months bill

MRS SMALLEY You are a swine

BAKER Do you accept?

MRS SMALLEY You are a pig! You'd eat cinders if you could get
nowt else

BAKER I should I'd rather have you than any of the boiling, but I
must, I must, have——

MRS SMALLEY Two hundred?

BAKER Not less

MRS SMALLEY Six months bill

BAKER Six months bill

MRS SMALLEY I hope you'll get it

BAKER I intend to

MRS SMALLEY (*after a speechless moment*) You are a devil when
you've had a drop

BAKER Am I a dear one?

MRS SMALLEY Do you call yourself cheap?

BAKER What do you think? I was always one of the "take it or
leave it" sellers

MRS SMALLEY I think you imagine yourself worth a great sight
more than you are

BAKER Hm! I should have thought you'd have found the figure
easy And I've always said I'd rather it was you than anybody

MRS SMALLEY You was mighty slow, then, once on a day

BAKER I was a young cock-sparrow then—common—but wouldn't
die in a cage

MRS SMALLEY An' what do you reckon you are now?

BAKER I'm an old duck that knows "dilly-dilly"!

MRS SMALLEY "Come and be killed"

BAKER Scatter me a bit of golden coin—two hundred—and you
may wring my neck

MRS SMALLEY You must have an empty crop

BAKER A few pebbles that'll digest me if I don't——

MRS SMALLEY Debts?

BAKER I said pebbles

MRS SMALLEY You're a positive fiend in drink

BAKER But what about——?

Enter RACHEL, a tall, pale girl, with dark circles under her eyes She has a consumed look, as if her quiet pallor smothered a fire She wears a servant's cap and apron covered by a large dark shawl She enters softly

RACHEL I thought I heard you two

MRS SMALLEY (*startled*) You might knock!

RACHEL Were you talking secrets?

BAKER Have you come to look for me, Rachel?

RACHEL (*cuttingly*) You think a mighty lot of yourself

BAKER Have a drop of Scotch? No? How's that? There's Harry's glass—drink out of that

RACHEL You're very clever at giving away what's not your own
Give me yours

BAKER I've not finished with it—but you can drink with me
Here!

RACHEL No, thank you

BAKER (*softly, smiling*) Why, what has offended you?

RACHEL Nothing, indeed

BAKER That's alright I don't like you to be offended As a sign
of good luck (*She sips*) Thanks I'm sorry I'm late

RACHEL You're not there yet, so you can't be late

BAKER Yes, I am there What farther have I to go?

RACHEL (*singing*)

“You've got a long way to go,
You've got a long way to go,”

MRS SMALLEY (*singing in a masculine voice*)

“Before you get hold of the donkey's tether
You've got a long way to go ”

BAKER (*singing in a fine bass*)

“If I had an ass and he wouldn't go,
Would I wallop him? Oh, dear no!
I'd give hi some corn and say ‘Gee whow,
Neddy, stand still while I mount, oh ho!’ ”

MRS SMALLEY He's the donkey

BAKER Who doesn't make an ass of himself sometimes?

MRS SMALLEY And we've got to give him some corn

BAKER For you'll never catch him to get hold of his tail—salt's no good

MRS SMALLEY How much corn? Tell her

BAKER Two hundred—and fifty—golden grains No more

RACHEL What's up with him to-night?

MRS SMALLEY Oh, he's had a drop, an' it always sets him on edge
He's like a razor When he's had a drop, if you stroke him you cut yourself a-two

RACHEL Goodness!

BAKER Rachel, I'd sell my immortal soul for two hundred—and fifty—golden sovereigns

RACHEL I'm not buying immortal souls, thanks

BAKER With this (*He spreads out his hands*)—this paper and string to wrap it in

RACHEL An' a nice parcel of goods you are!

BAKER I'm a lucky bag, Rachel You don't know all that's in me, yet

RACHEL And what is that, pray?

BAKER I don't know myself But you shall have leave to rummage me (*He throws open his arms*) Look! (*He rises from his chair, as if were superbly He is a fine, portly, not unhandsome man He strikes a "superb" attitude*) Look, Rachel For two hundred and fifty pounds, three months bill, I am (*He bows*) your slave You shall (*He speaks with cynical sincerity*) bring down my head as low as you like (*He bows low*), I swear it, and I never swore a lie

RACHEL But what do you want two hundred and fifty pounds for?

HARRY (*entering*) Has Nurse come?

BAKER Not yet Are you going to finish your glass? It has taken me all my time to stop the women sipping from it

RACHEL Story! You know I wouldn't—

BAKER Hush! Don't be rash now, or you'll hate me to-morrow

RACHEL And should you care?

BAKER I am willing to give you full rights over my immortal soul and this paper and string—

MRS SMALLEY For two hundred down—

BAKER (*bowing—then looking to RACHEL*) And fifty, Mrs Smalley

RACHEL What do you think of it, Susy? Is it a bargain?

BAKER (*setting his cap on the back of his head and pulling on a large*

RACHEL Yes

HARRY Did ter tell him I used ter shout out that somebody wor coming if thou wanted to kiss me?

RACHEL Yes

HARRY An' as I was allers swallerin' my spittle for fright?

RACHEL Yes

HARRY An' I wor like a girl, as dursn't look thee atween the eyes, for all I was worth?

RACHEL Yes

HARRY An' dursn't I?

RACHEL Yes—an' don't (*She closes her eyes*)

HARRY What! An' all t'other things about me as the pit was full of?

RACHEL Oh, no! Oh, no!

HARRY Yes, tha did!

RACHEL No, oh no, Harry!

HARRY An' are ter courtin' Job Arthur Bowers?

RACHEL Oh!

HARRY Scream, an' I'll squeeze thy head again' that chair-back till it cracks like a nut

RACHEL (*whimpering*) Oh dear, oh dear

HARRY It is "oh dear"—an' it 'as been for me "oh dear" Listen 'ere, tha brazend hussy Tha keeps thy face shut when tha comes near me Dost hear?

RACHEL Yes

HARRY None o' thy cheek, not another word, in future—or I'll—what?

RACHEL No

HARRY An' dunna touch me till tha'rt axed Not so much as wi' thy frock Dost hear?

RACHEL Yes

HARRY What dost hear?

RACHEL I mustn't touch you

HARRY Not till thou'rt axed An' lu' thee here, my lady—I s'll brain thee if tha says a word to me—sithee? (*He thrusts his fist in her face*)

RACHEL Somebody will come—let me go, let me go!

HARRY An' what I've said, I mean—drunk or sover Sithee?

RACHEL Yes, Harry! Oh, let me go

HARRY I'll let thee go (*He does so, slowly*) An' tha can go wi' who tha likes, an' marry who tha likes, but if tha says a word about me, I'll come for thee There! (*He unbinds her She lays her hand on his sleeve*) No! (*He shakes her off She rises and stands dejectedly before him*) I hate thee now enough to strangle thee

RACHEL (*bursting into tears*) Oh, you are——

HARRY Now go wi' who tha likes—get off

RACHEL You are——

HARRY I want none o' thee—go!

She is departing

An' ta'e thy shawl wi' thee

She, weeping, picks up her shawl

An' lap it round thee—it's a raw night

She does so He speaks gently now

Now go

Exit RACHEL HARRY pours himself another glass of whisky

He goes to the cupboard

Patty! Pat!

He puts his face caressingly among the bird's feathers

We'll settle her Pat—eh? We'll stop her gallop Hey, Pat!

He tosses the bird into the air wildly

CURTAIN

SCENE II

A few moments later The road just outside the HEMSTOCKS' Deep darkness two cottage lights in the background In the foreground, a large white swing gate leading from the farmyard into the road, a stile beside the gate MRS SMALLEY leans against the big white gatepost Enter RACHEL, drying her tears from the background She steps through the stile SUSY moves

RACHEL Oh! Oh! Oh Harry!

MRS SMALLEY It's only me, shut up

RACHEL Oh, you did give me a turn, Susy!

MRS SMALLEY Whatever's up?

RACHEL Nothing Who are you looking for?

MRS SMALLEY Nobody.

RACHEL Has Job Arthur gone?

MRS SMALLEY You saw him go

RACHEL Not that I care

MRS SMALLEY I bet you don't You carry on as if you don't care
You do You needn't pretend to be so mighty struck on our
Harry, you know it's all sham

RACHEL It's not, Susy There's no sham about it, I wish there
was He's got his eye on Nurse, it's my belief

MRS SMALLEY An' she's got her eye on my mother's money, I
know She's sniffing like a cat over a mouse hole, an' cottoning
on to our Harry

RACHEL She's deep, she is—an' he'd be as big as a lord for at the
bottom he's that stuck-up he doesn't know what to do with
himself

MRS SMALLEY I believe she knows something about the will

RACHEL Well, surely——

MRS SMALLEY An' from summat as my mother let drop, I'd be
bound she's in it, wi' our Harry

RACHEL His mother always made me cheap in his eyes

MRS SMALLEY If I could get to know——

RACHEL Doesn't your Harry know?

MRS SMALLEY How should I know what he knows?

RACHEL My father's pining for Nurse, the old fool I wish he'd
get her His money might get her I'll buck him up

MRS SMALLEY I'll get in her way wi' our Harry as much as I can

RACHEL Alright You are a bit gone on Job Arthur, aren't you?

MRS SMALLEY He should ha' married me, by rights, twelve years
back

RACHEL There's something fascinating about him Does he really
want £250?

MRS SMALLEY Yes

RACHEL I believe my father would give it me, if I got married
to please him

MRS SMALLEY Alright, there's your chance then

RACHEL You needn't be nasty, Susy I don't want the chance

MRS SMALLEY You dodge round too many corners, like a ferret,
you do

RACHEL At any rate, I'm not waiting for somebody to die and leave me bait to chuck to a fat fist of a fellow

MRS SMALLEY You'd better mind what you're saying, Rachel Wilcox

RACHEL I don't care about you So there

MRS SMALLEY Doesn't 'er though? What about our Harry? I'll let him know a thing or two

RACHEL It's you as has been saying things, I know You've been telling him abo t Job Arthur Bowers

MRS SMALLEY Oh, have I? You're mighty clever

RACHEL You don't need to be clever to see through you But I'll make you pay for it, my lady

MRS SMALLEY What? Come out here—

RACHEL There's the Baron—an' they don't know I'm out!

*She runs into hiding as a lantern appears down the lane
SUSY draws after her*

SUSY What's he after?

RACHEL Lovers They hunt 'em out every Monday night Shut up now (In a whisper) Does my white apron show?

BARON We haf done good work this night

BARONESS *(tall and spare, in an antique cloak and bonnet)* Seven couples, Baron—and we have only been out an hour Isn't it terrible!

BARON These miners are not men—they are animals that prowl by night

BARONESS The girls are worse, with their faces of brass It is they who entice the young men into these naughty holes and crannies

BARON But if a man haf honour, will he not woo a maiden in her father's house, in the presence of her family?

BARONESS This is a parish of sin, Baron, the people love sin

BARON Defiant in sin, they are But I will overthrow them I will drive them before me into the pit]

BARONESS To think of that brazen besom telling us to go home and go to bed—

BARON And the man—ah, infamous, gross insult! And coward, to revile me that I have no child

BARONESS If they had a few less—and they born of sin—the low women! That is the house of the woman Hemstock Have you seen her?

BARON Not yet I will not bury her, heathen and blasphemous woman She shall not soil my graveyard of good dead And those, her men folk, obstreperous and enemies of God, I will bow low their necks —

BARONESS Hush, there are some—I believe there are—behind the gate——

BARON More? Ah, misery, more than linked worms! Where? My dull eyes!

BARONESS There—behind the gatepost——

BARON (*holding aloft the candle*) Lovers, if you be there, why do you suck at sin? Is this honour, you man? There is no one there, Baroness

BARONESS Yes, Baron, yes I can see her apion Who are you? Come out of there You, girl, I see you Come out, for shame You do not know what you are doing, or, if you do, you are the depth of wickedness (*A titter is heard*)

BARON Where is the man? Show yourself, sir Let me see the man You lurk, sir, in a hole like a rat Ah, the disgrace of mankind

BARONESS What is going to become of you, girl? Go home, before it is too late Go home and learn to do your housework

BARON You press into the boughs of the trees, but the boughs are the little arms of God You hide yourselves deep in the darkness, which is but the pupil of the eye of God Ah like a hot spark you fret the eye of God with your lust

BARONESS You will rue it this time next year, I tell you

BARON The face of the man is full of shame, it is afraid lest it fall under my eye

He holds the lantern peering at the woman The BARONESS hovers close behind RACHEL pushes SUSY out upon the little man The lantern is extinguished

BARONESS Oh, oh, come away, Baron, come away!

BARON Ha! Ha! (*His voice is screaming*) It is the attack! Stand behind me, Baroness, I defend you (*He ends on a high note, flourishing a stick he carries*) I have hit him! Ha! Come on!

MRS SMALLEY You've hit me, you little swine

BARON Stand behind me, Baroness I defeat this man—I—(*He chokes with gutturals and consonants*)

Would you you little swine!

BARON I will thrash you—I will thrash you—low-bred knave, I will—*(He sputters into German)*

MRS SMALLEY Let me get hold on thee, I'll crack thy little-yed for thee

BARONESS Baron, Baron, they are murdering you!"

BARON Ah, my sword, my sword! Baroness, my sword! I keep him at bay with this stick

MRS SMALLEY I'll show thee, the little nuisance, whether tha'rt ter hit me on the shoulder

BARON I have not my strength of old, if I had my sword he were killed

BARONESS Thy are murdering the Baron! Help! Help! Oh Baron——

RACHEL *(suddenly rushing at her)* Shut up, you old chuck! Shoo!

BARONESS *(screaming)* Baron! Rudolf, Rudolf! Oh-h——!

BARON *(groaning)* Ah, Baroness!

He turns SUSY rushes through his guard and seizes his wrist

MRS SMALLEY I'll have that stick!

BARON The lady—the Baroness von Ruge, my wife, let me go to her!

MRS SMALLEY Drop that stick, tha little——!

BARON Little, little again! Ah, my sword to thee Let go my wrists, foul one, base one, fight thus! *(He lapses into a foreign fizzle)*

BARONESS *(fleeing)* Help, help, help!

RACHEL *(catching her by the end of her long cloak and pulling her round backwards)* Whoa, you're going a bit too fast!

BARONESS Whose voice is that? What? Oh-h——!

Enter NURSE

NURSE *(breathless)* Whatever is the matter? Who is it?

MRS SMALLEY Drop that stick, little lizard——

BARON My wife! God, think of my wife!

BARONESS Baron—they're killing me—Baron!

NURSE Baroness! Oh, for shame—oh, how dreadful!

She runs to RACHEL, who flees

HARRY *(rushing up)* What's goin' off?

NURSE The poor Baron—an old man! Oh, how dreadful!

BARONESS Rudolf, Rudolf! Where am I—what—where?

BARON I will kill you

HARRY *(to his sister)* Has ter no more sense, gre't hound?

MRS SMALLEY What's tha got ter do wi' it? (*to the* BARON) Drop that stick!

BARON I will certainly

HARRY Come off! (*He wrenches loose her wrists*)

BARON Ha! (*in triumph*) Thief! (*He rushes forward SUSY avoids him quickly He attacks HARRY, fetching him a smart whack*)

HARRY The little wasp——

NURSE Don't, Mr Hemstock—don't hurt him!

BARON Ha! (*He rushes again HARRY dodges to avoid him, stumbles, the BARON gets in a blow HARRY goes down*) Ha, I have smitten him—Ha!

BARONESS (*fleeing*) Baron—help! Help! Baron——

BARON (*pursuing*) My wife——

NURSE (*to BARONESS*) Come away, Baroness, come away quickly
The Baron is alright

BARONESS I have lost a galosher, he has lost his hat, and the lantern—oh!

BARON Ah, Baroness, safe! God be glorified What—oh, only Nurse We haf been ambushed by a band of ruffians

NURSE You had better hurry to the vicarage, Baron, you will take cold

BARON Speak not to me of cold We haf narrowly escaped Are you wounded, Baroness?

BARONESS Where is your hat, and the lantern, and my galosher?

BARON What matter

NURSE You had better take the Baroness home, Baron She will be ill

BARONESS We can't afford to lose them—the lantern and your hat and a pair of galoshes

BARON Speak not of such——

They leave

HARRY (*rising slowly*) The little snipe!

MRS SMALLEY It serves thee right

CURTAIN

SCENE III

In the kitchen of the HEMSTOCKS' house MR HEMSTOCK is stirring a saucepan over the fire

NURSE (*entering*) I am late Are you making the food? I'm sorry

MR HEMSTOCK I hardly liked leavin' her—she's funny to-night
What's a' th' row been about?

NURSE Somebody buffeting the Baron and Baroness I've just seen
them safely on the path Has Harry come in?

MR HEMSTOCK No—hark—here he is! Whatever!

The door opens Enter HARRY, very muddy, blood running down his cheek

Whatever 'as ter done to thysen?

HARRY Fell down

NURSE Oh dear—how dreadful! Come and let me look! What a
gash! I must bind it up It is not serious

MR HEMSTOCK Tha'd better ta'e thy jacket off, afore Nurse touches
thee

HARRY does so MR HEMSTOCK continues making the food

NURSE sets the kettle on the fire and gets a bowl

NURSE (*to HARRY*) You feel faint—would you like to lie down?

HARRY I'm a' right

NURSE Yes, you *are* all right, I think Sit here What a house of
calamities! However did it happen?

HARRY The Baron hit me, and I fell over the lantern

NURSE Dear me—how dreadful!

HARRY I feel fair dizzy, Nurse—as soft as grease

NURSE You are sure to do

Exit MR HEMSTOCK with basin

HARRY Drunk, like Tha'rt as good as a mother to me, Nurse

NURSE Am I?

HARRY My mother worna one ter handle you very tender 'Er
wor rough, not like thee

NURSE You see, she hadn't my practice

HARRY She 'adna thy hands 'Er's rayther bad to-day, Nurse I
s'll be glad when 'er's gone It ma'es yer feel as if you
was screwed in a tight jacket—as if you'd burst innerds

ACT III

SCENE I

The morning after the previous scene The dining-room at the vicarage, a spacious but sparsely furnished apartment, the BARON considering himself in all circumstances a soldier The BARON, in martial-looking smoking jacket, is seated at a desk, writing, saying the words aloud The clock shows eleven Enter BARONESS, in tight-sleeved paisley dressing-gown, rucked at neck and down the front She wears a mobcap

BARON (*rising hastily and leading her to her chair*) You are sure, Baroness, you are sufficiently recovered to do this?

BARONESS I am only pinned together, Baron I shall collapse if the least thing happens

BARON It shall not happen

BARONESS My head has threshed round like a windmill all night

BARON Did I sleep?

BARONESS No, Baron, no, no! How do you find yourself this morning?

BARON Younger, Baroness I have heard the clash of battle

BARONESS I was so afraid you had felt it

BARON I—I—but I shall fall to no sickness I shall receive the thrust when I am in the pulpit, I shall hear the cry, "Rudolf von Ruge"! I fling up my hand, and my spirit stands at attention before the Commander

BARONESS Oh Baron, don't I shall dread Sunday

BARON Dread it, Baroness! Ah, when it comes, what glory!

BARONESS I have fought obscurely I have fought the small, inconspicuous fight, wounded with many little wounds of ignominy But then—what glory!

BARONESS Has Nurse come yet?

BARON She has not, Baroness

BARONESS I wish she would

BARON You feel ill—hide nothing from me

BARONESS She promised to try and get the things I know the

hat will be ruined, but if we recover the galosh and the lantern,
'twill be a salvation

BARON 'Tis nothing

BARONESS 'Tis, Baron, your hat cost 15/- —and my pair of
galoshes, 3/6, and the lantern, 2/11 What is that, Baron? Reckon
it up

BARON I cannot—I have not—(*a pause*) it is twenty-one shillings
and one penny

BARONESS 15/-, and 3/6—15, 16, 17, 18—that's 18/6 and 2/11—
18—19, 20 (*Counting*) And five pence, Baron Twenty-one
shillings and five pence

BARON 'Tis nothing, Baroness

BARONESS 'Tis a great deal, Baron Hark! Who is that called?

BARON I cannot hear

BARONESS I will go and see

BARON No, Baroness—I go

BARONESS To the kitchen, Baron?

*Exit The BARON, at the window, cries on the Lord, in
German*

NURSE (*at the door*) Good morning

BARONESS (*hastily turning back*) Have you got them?

NURSE The hat and the galosh—we couldn't find the lantern

BARONESS Those wicked Hemstocks have appropriated it

NURSE No, Baroness, I think not

BARONESS Your hat is not ruined, Baron—a miracle Put it on—
it looks as good as new What a blessing Just a little brushing—
and my galosh is not hurt But to think those wretches should
secrete my lantern I will show them——

BARON Baroness!

BARONESS I was going to the kitchen I hear a man's voice

NURSE The Baker's cart is there

BARONESS Ah! (*Exit BARONESS*)

NURSE I am very glad the Baroness is not ill this morning

BARON Ah Nurse, the villainy of this world Believe that a number
of miners, ruffians, should ambush and attack the Baroness and
me, out of wrath at our good work The power of evil is strong,
Nurse

NURSE It is, Baron, I'm sorry to say

BARON I think those people Hemstock instigated this, Nurse

NURSE No, Baron, I am sure not

BARON Will you say why you are sure, Nurse?

NURSE I saw, Baron It was not Harry Hemstock, nor his father

BARON Then who, Nurse? They are criminals It is wickedness to cover their sin Then who, Nurse?

NURSE Some people from Northrop I cannot say whom You know, Baron, you are an aristocrat, and these people hate you for it

BARON The mob issues from its lair like a plague of rats Shall it put us down and devour the land? Ah, its appetite is base, each for his several stomach You knew them, Nurse?

NURSE No, Baron

BARON You heard them—what they said—their voices

NURSE I heard one say "Catch hold of Throttle-ha'penny!"

BARON "Catch hold of Trottle-ha'penny"—Throttle-ha'penny, what is that?

NURSE I think it means the Baroness They are so broad, these people, I can't understand them

BARON I will punish them Under the sword they shall find wisdom

BARONESS'S VOICE Oh, shameless! Shameless!

RACHEL'S VOICE He was looking at my brooch

BARONESS'S VOICE Come here, Baker, come back

BAKER'S VOICE A stale loaf to change, Baroness?

BARONESS'S VOICE You shall go before the Baron this time Go in the dining-room, Rachel

BAKER'S VOICE Me too?

Enter RACHEL, in cap and apron, the BAKER, and the BARONESS

BAKER (*entering*) Thank you, Missis Good morning, Nurse Expect to find the Baroness in bed? I did

BARONESS (*to RACHEL*) Stand there!

BARON (*sternly to BAKER*) Stand there! Take a seat, Nurse Pray be seated, Baroness

BAKER (*seating himself in the armchair*) Hope I haven't got your chair, Baron

BARON Stand, sir

BAKER (*to NURSE, as he rises*) Nearly like my father said to the curate "They're a' mine!"

BARON Baroness!

BARONESS He ^{was} was, Baron, he was——

RACHEL He was bending down to look at my new brooch (*She shows it*)

BARONESS With his arm——

BAKER On her apron strings——

BARONESS He was stooping——

BAKER To look at her new brooch

BARON Silence!

BARONESS He kissed her

BARON Coward! Coward! Coward, sir!

BAKER Ditto to you, Mister

BARON What! *Sir*! Do you know——?

BAKER That you are the "Baron von Ruge"? No, I've only your bare word for it

NURSE For shame, Mr Bowers

BAKER When a little old man, Nurse, calls a big young man a coward, he's presuming on his years and size to bully, and I say, a bully's a coward

BARON You contaminate my maid

BAKER I contaminate your maid?

BARONESS The shameless baggage What have I always said of her!

BARON Baroness von Ruge! (*to BAKER*) You are going to marry her?

BAKER It's a question generally put to the woman

BARON Answer me, sir

BAKER I couldn't say which she's going to marry, out of her one or two fellows

BARONESS Shameless! Ah, the slut!

BARON I repeat, sir—do you intend to marry this maid?

BAKER I hadn't fully made up my mind——

BARON Then, sir, you are a villain——

BAKER You've got the muscle of your years up, Mister——

BARON You threaten me!

BARONESS Baron!

RACHEL I sh'd have thought you'd more about you, Job Arthur Bowers

NURSE (*deprecating*) Oh, Mr Bowers!

BAKER Right you are, Nurse!

BARON I say, sir, a man who kisses a maid——

BAKER Ought to be hanged for it—so say I

BARON Sir, your facetiousness is untimely I say, a man who kisses a maid——

BARONESS Baron, such people do not understand——

BARON (*kissing her hand*) Baroness!

RACHEL (*melting*) We're not given the chance

BARON Sir, is there no reverence in a kiss? If you strike a match against the box, even, you wonder at the outburst of fire Then, sir—but do you wonder at nothing?

BAKER Nothing's surprising—but everything is comical, Baron, that's how I find it

BARON (*puzzled and distressed*) So! So! Ah, but a woman *is*, according to her image in the eye of the men

BAKER (*looking at the BARONESS*) Some of us must have fancy eyes

NURSE How can you be so flippant?

BARONESS A woman is what a man makes her

BAKER By gum, there's no tellin' what you might manufacture in time, then It's a big job to begin of

RACHEL (*laughing*) For shame, Job Arthur

BARONESS What have you to say? You bad creature! What wonder men are as they are?

BAKER When the women make them

BARON You are of my parish?

BAKER Yes—but I'm in Northrop Church choir

BARON You are a chorister? You *wish* to marry Rachel?

BAKER As I say, I haven't decided

BARON But what are you doing? What of this maid?

BARONESS What does he care! Are you a married man, Baker?

BAKER Not that I know to, Missis

BARON Sir, I am an old man, you remind me——

BAKER Beg pardon, Baron

BARON And—a powerless—and I will say it, I will—a useless——

BARONESS Baron!

BARON Sir—I shall soon be called in—and, sir, you are of my parish, Rachel is of my house What have I done, who am responsible?

BAKER Nay, Baron, I can't see as you're to fault

BARON My fault, sir, is failure, and failure without honour In three campaigns, which are my life, I have been miserably beaten

BARONESS No, Baron, no How are you to blame?

NURSE No, Baron, you have not failed

BARON In Poland, in London, and in my parish of Greenway
Baroness, we retire to a cottage, I sit still and contain myself, under sentence—Baroness, your pardon!

BARONESS You shall not retire, Baron Before God, I witness, you are no failure! Ah, Rachel, see now what you've done

RACHEL (*weeping*) It's not me

BAKER Nay, for that matter—would you marry me, Rachel, eh?

RACHEL Opportunity's a fine thing, you mean

BAKER Will you marry me, Rachel?

RACHEL I—yes, I will, Job Arthur

BARON She loves you, she let you kiss her But you, sir, do you honour her?

BAKER I do

BARON Then will you leave me?

BAKER Good morning, sir—and thank you

He and RACHEL leave

BARONESS You are not ill, Baron?

BARON No, Baroness Nurse, who is this man?

NURSE The Baker? Oh, he's Job Arthur Bowers—a bit rackety He lives down Greenhill with his old mother She's as deaf as a post, and a little bit crazed But she's very fond of her son

BARON Ah! She is mad? She is old? Will Rachel be good to her?

BARONESS I very much doubt it

NURSE Rachel will be afraid of Job Arthur Bowers He is too big for her ever to get her apron strings round him

BARON (*smiling slightly*) I began to be afraid, Nurse

BARONESS (*at the window*) He is bringing my lantern

NURSE Who? Ah, that's right

BARONESS Will you ring, Baron? I will question that young man We must get to the bottom of last night's affair, Baron

BARON Those ruffians shall not go unpunished Still I have power for that

BARONESS (*to RACHEL*) Show that young man in here Nurse, you

will help us We must hold our own against these ungodly creatures Must we not, Baron?

BARON Ah, Baroness, still we fight

RACHEL Harry Hemstock

HARRY (*entering, his head bound up*) I've brought this 'ere hurricane-lamp

BARONESS Thank you And where did you find it?

HARRY Where you'd lost it

BARONESS What have you done to your head?

HARRY (*after a silence*) You should know

BARONESS There, Baron I was right And you would have stolen the lantern if Nurse had not——

BARON Leave the lantern, Baroness Sir, who were your accomplices in this nightly attack?

HARRY What's 'e mean, Nurse?

NURSE The Baron means what men were those that attacked the Baroness and him last night I say they were some men out of Northrop—that you could not recognize them Mr Hemstock came to your assistance Baron

BARON Is that so?

HARRY I pulled 'er off'n thee

BARON What is it he says, Nurse?

NURSE He says he pulled the man away who was trying to hold you

BARON Ah! Tell me, sir—who was this ruffian?

HARRY I non know, no

BARON Who struck you that blow? That you must know, and that must be told to me

HARRY Tha ought ter know thyself

BARONESS You are speaking to the Baron, remember

HARRY An't wor him as gin me a clack ower th' yed

BARON Then you were with the enemy Now I behold you, sir I will cause you, sir, I will make you to confess I will see you punished You shall suffer this course

NURSE You are mistaken, Baron

BARON Nurse, I will conduct this inquiry of myself It is not of myself But your cowardice, yours and those others', to attack a lady, by night There is a penalty for such, sir, I say you are vile, and you shall name me the other villains

HARRY There was no other villains—without you call a couple of women villains

BARON What mean you by a couple of women?

BARONESS He doesn't know what he's talking about

NURSE There were some men, Mr Hemstock—from Northrop

HARRY Well, if there wan, I didna see 'em All I see'd was two women draggin' at th' old Baron

BARON You mean to say we were attacked only by two women—Baroness?

NURSE He must be mistaken

BARONESS These people would say anything

BARON Tell me, sir, tell me the truth at once

HARRY I've told you the truth

BARON It was some men, Baroness? At least, Baroness, one man there was——

BARONESS There was one man—how many more I can't say

BARON The throat of these people is fuller of untruth than a bird's gizzard——

HARRY It is the truth I've told you

BARON Nurse—speak—was it two women?

NURSE It certainly was men, Baron

HARRY Well, it certainly wan't, an' I'm not a liar

BARON Then it was two women?

HARRY It was

BARON And a woman has smitten your head?

HARRY No, you did that yourself, with your thick stick, when I'd pulled our Susy off'n you An' I fell over your lantern and it cut me

BARONESS A likely tale

HARRY Is it true, Nurse Broadbanks?

NURSE I think you are mistaken, Mr Hemstock Oh, do not be so persistent

HARRY I'll not be made a liar of Wheeler's Rachel?

BARONESS Why Rachel? She has nothing to do with it

HARRY Fetch her in then

NURSE She has just been in She is engaged to Job Arthur Bowers——

HARRY I don't care what she is

BARON I will ring

NURSE It is difficult

MR WILCOX I've been trying this last ten years, an' I've not had a good one yet Either they eat you up, or waste, or drink What do you think to-day? You know how it was raining I got home from pit soaked No breeches an' waistcoat put to waim—fire nearly out

NURSE Oh, it is too bad

MR WILCOX An' in the fender, a great row of roast potatoes, hard as nag-nails—not done a bit——

NURSE What a shame——

MR WILCOX An' not a morsel of meat to eat to them She'd aten the great piece of cold mutton left from yesterday, an' then said I hadn't left 'er no money for no meat

NURSE How stupid!

MR WILCOX So it was taters—you had to chomp 'em like raw turnip—an' drippin'—an' a bit of a batter puddin' tough as whit-leather

NURSE Poor man

MR WILCOX An' no fire—there never is when I come home I believe she sells the coal

NURSE Isn't it dreadful?

MR WILCOX An' they're all alike

NURSE I suppose they are

MR WILCOX They are You know I'm an easy man to live with, Nurse

NURSE I'm sure you are

MR WILCOX One as gives very little trouble Nay, I can fettle for myself—an' does so

NURSE I have seen you

MR WILCOX And I think I deserve a bit better treatment, Nurse

~~NURSE~~ I'm sure you do

MR WILCOX An' I ought to be able to get it If I was drunken or thriftless I should say nothing

NURSE But you're not

MR WILCOX No I'm not I've been a steady and careful man all my life A Chapel-going man, whereas you're Church—but that's a detail

NURSE It *ought* not to matter

MR WILCOX You know, Nurse, I've got four *good* houses—lets at six shillings each

NURSE Yes, I know you have

MR WILCOX Besides a tidy bit in the bank

NURSE And you have saved it all?

MR WILCOX Every penny

NURSE Ha!

MR WILCOX An' there's on'y Rachel I'd give her a couple of houses straight off, an' then we should be alright *there* nobody could grumble

NURSE You *could* do that, of course

MR WILCOX Nurse, do you know how old I am?

NURSE No, Mr Wilcox

MR WILCOX I'm just fifty-eight

NURSE Hm! I should have thought you were more

MR WILCOX I'm not

NURSE It is comparatively young

MR WILCOX It's not *old*, is it? And though I've been a widower these ten years—I'm not—I'm not good for nowt, d'yer see?

NURSE Of course you're not

MR WILCOX An' you know, Nurse, you're just the one for me

NURSE (*laughing*) Am I Mr Wilcox?

MR WILCOX Nurse, will you tell me your name?

NURSE Broadbanks

MR WILCOX You know I meant your Christian name Don't torment me, Nurse, I can't stand it

NURSE I was baptized Millicent Emily

MR WILCOX "Millicent Emily"—it's like the "Song of Solomon"
Can I say it again?

NURSE If you will say it only to yourself

MR WILCOX My name is James—Jim for short

NURSE I thought it was Hezekiah—~~or~~ Ezekiel

MR WILCOX Hezekiah's my second name—James Hezekiah

NURSE I like Hezekiah better

MR WILCOX Do you—I thought you didn't Oh, I'm glad you like it But yours is lovely

NURSE I prefer Nurse

MR WILCOX So do I—nice and short (*A pause*) Shall I sing to you, Nurse?

NURSE Do you sing?

MR WILCOX Oh, yes—I used to be a great one at “Ora pro Nobis”

Should I sing you “Gentle Annie”? I used to sing that forty years since

NURSE When you were courting, Mr Wilcox?

MR WILCOX Afore that

He hesitates—goes to the piano and, after fumbling, begins to vamp to “What Are the Wild Waves Saying” He begins to sing, “lamentoso”

NURSE There’s someone at the door!

Not hearing, or observing, he continues to play She opens to DR FOULES they stand smiling MR WILCOX stops playing and wheels round

DR FOULES “Music, when soft voices die, vibrates in the memory”

NURSE Mr Wilcox was enlivening my leisure Do you know Mr Wilcox, Dr Foules?

DR FOULES I have not had the pleasure till now

He bows

MR WILCOX Good even’—I wasn’t aware as anybody was here

DR FOULES “By rapture’s blaze impelled he swelled the artless lay”

NURSE I think Mr Wilcox sings very well indeed Will you finish, Mr Wilcox?

MR WILCOX No, thanks, I must be going

DR FOULES Pray do not let me hasten you away

MR WILCOX Oh, I was just going Well—happen you’ll call at our house, Nurse?

NURSE I will, Mr Wilcox

He leaves

DR FOULES Did I interrupt you?

NURSE You did not interrupt me

~~DR~~ DR FOULES Then I incur no disfavour?

NURSE Not for stopping poor Mr Wilcox at “Brother, I hear no singing”—Poor man!

DR FOULES You pity him?

NURSE I do

DR FOULES Ah! Is it of the mind-melting sort?

NURSE I do not understand

DR FOULES “For pity melts the mind to love”

NURSE No—poor man I can just imagine my mother, if I took him down to Kent Well, you've done a nice thing for yourself—

DR FOULES You daren't face family^a criticism?

NURSE I daren't

DR FOULES Ah! Then he *does* aspire?

NURSE Poor old fellow!

DR FOULES I do not like your pity, Nurse—however near akin it may be to something better

NURSE You have often incurred it, Doctor

DR FOULES Which of the two, Nurse?

NURSE The pity, of course I have said "poor boy"

DR FOULES Why?

NURSE Why? (*She laughs*) Because, I suppose, you were pitiable

DR FOULES (*blushing*) You mean I was to be pitied Why?

NURSE Because you were not like the Pears' Soapy baby—"He won't be happy till he gets it," but you went on washing your self without soap, good as gold

DR FOULES I cannot apply your simile

NURSE Perhaps not I never was literary

DR FOULES You have grown brilliant—and caustic, if I may say so

NURSE It is the first time I have been accused of brilliance

DR FOULES Then perhaps I am the steel which sheds the sparks from your flint

NURSE Oh, the sparks may come, but they're not noticed Perhaps you are only the literary man who catches them on his tinder and blows them into notice You love a phrase beyond everything

DR FOULES Really—I hardly recognize you, Nurse

NURSE And what did your mother say of me?

DR FOULES I thank you for calling so soon Did she seem changed, to you?

NURSE She looks very ill

DR FOULES Yes, I am worried

NURSE You are afraid it is something serious?

DR FOULES Yes

NURSE I hope not But it put me about to see her looking so frail She was very kind to me

DR FOULES You are very good, Nurse

NURSE It is my duty to be sympathetic, Doctor

DR FOULES And use is second nature I will take courage, Nurse

NURSE Will it not be a complete disguise?

DR FOULES Your duty does not extend to *me*, Nurse

NURSE No, Doctor

DR FOULES You wish me to see you in *your* new guise, Nurse

You stick daw's feathers among your dove's plumage

NURSE (*laughing*) What, am I a dove then? It is a silly bird

DR FOULES You have had a hard time, Nurse?

NURSE I have got over the hardness, thank you It is all moderate,
now

DR FOULES Might it not be *more* than moderate?

NURSE I hope it will be some day

DR FOULES Could I help it, do you think?

NURSE Everybody helps it, by being amiable——

DR FOULES But might I not help it—more particularly? You used
to——

NURSE Say you are in love with me, Doctor——

DR FOULES I have always been——

NURSE Then the light has been under a bushel

DR FOULES "Blown to a core of ardour by the awful breath
of——" (*He smiles very confusedly*) I may hope then, Nurse

NURSE (*smiling*) Along with Mr Wilcox

DR FOULES Thank you for the company

NURSE Look here, Arthur, you have lived like a smug little candle
in a corner, with your mother to shelter you from every draught
Now you can get blown a bit I do not feel inclined to shelter
you for the rest of your life

DR FOULES Thank you

NURSE I am sorry if I am nasty But I am angry with you

DR FOULES It is evident

NURSE And I will still come and see your mother, if I may She is
a woman to respect

DR FOULES I do not order my mother's comings and goings The
case is the reverse you remember

NURSE Very well On *your* high horse, you are more like the
nursely than ever

DR FOULES Thank you

NURSE (*mimicking*) Thank you

DR FOULES I am surprised——

NURSE I am^{*} surprised—but—was that someone at the door?

DR FOULES I could not tell you

NURSE Excuse me, I will see

DR FOULES Let me go, first (*Catching his hat to depart*)

NURSE (*opening the door*) You, Mr Hemstock Will you come in?

Enter HARRY

DR FOULES Good evening, Mr Hemstock I will make way for you

NURSE “Applications considered Tuesday, between seven and nine p m” That is your meaning, Doctor?

DR FOULES With your usual astuteness, you have it

NURSE With my usual astuteness, I have avoided so far the “Matrimonial Post” This is the irony of fate, Doctor It never rains but it pours

DR FOULES (*bowing to NURSE and HARRY*) The third time pays for all, they say

NURSE (*laughing*) I will tell you to-morrow

DR FOULES It will not be too late to drop me a post card

NURSE I will see Good night, Dr Foules

DR FOULES Good night, Nurse Broadbanks I wish you luck

NURSE And lifelong happiness

DR FOULES Good night!

Exit DR FOULES

NURSE He is very pleasant, isn't he?

HARRY They say so

NURSE How is Mrs Hemstock?

HARRY She's worse She's not speakin'

NURSE Oh, I'm sorry to hear that Did you want me to do anything? Poor thing, it will be a relief when she's gone

HARRY The 'owd doctor's bin He told us to ax you to see her settled down——

NURSE Shall I come now?

HARRY Or in about half an hour's time—when you're ready

NURSE I may as well come now—when I've just tidied the room
Are you going to sit up with her? '

HARRY No—my father is, an' our Susy, I'm going to work

NURSE Going to work? I thought you hadn't a place

HARRY They sent me word as I wor to go to-morrow—buttyin' wi' Joe Birkin

NURSE And will it be a good place?

HARRY Ha! It's a sight better than ever I expected

NURSE Oh, that is nice, isn't it?

HARRY It's better nor mormin' about at home

NURSE It is I'm so glad, Mr Hemstock Then you'll stop at Greenway?

HARRY I'm reckonin' so There's nowt else, is there?

NURSE No—why should there be? You'll have to begin afresh after Mrs Hemstock has gone——

HARRY I'll make a start o' some sort

NURSE You will? Do you know, I've had old Mr Wilcox here to-night

HARRY Oh—ah?

NURSE He's so comical He was singing to me (*She laughs into her hand*)

HARRY He must ha' wanted summat to do——

NURSE I think so You never heard anything like it in your life

HARRY 'E never wor but dosy-baked

NURSE (*purring*) What does that mean?

HARRY Soft, batchy, sawney

NURSE Poor old chap It's no use being angry with him, is it?

HARRY What foi?

NURSE For thinking I would accept him

HARRY No, it's not good bein' mad wi' him

NURSE He looked so crestfallen

HARRY He'll be just as game by to-morrow

NURSE Of couse he will Men only pretend to be so heartbroken By supper-time they've forgotten

HARRY An' what's a woman do?

NURSE I don't know You see it means more to a woman It's her life To a man it's only a pleasant change

HARRY To all appearances, you'd think it worn't such a life-an'-death affair to her

NURSE Why?

HARRY Woman is reckoned to be pinin' for you, goes an' makes a liar an' a fool of you in front of other folks

NURSE You mean Rachel Wilcox

HARRY Ah—'appen I do

NURSE But, poor old Baron, it would have killed him

HARRY Then^a let him die What good is he, here or anywhere else?

NURSE Oh, Mr Hemstock!

HARRY Besides, she did it to spite me, because 'er wor mad wi' me

NURSE But she is engaged to Mr Bowers

HARRY 'Appen so 'Er bites 'er nose off to spite her face

NURSE But poor old Baron—it would have been so cruel

HARRY Would he have stopped tellin' everybody else the truth?

NURSE But you can't judge in that way——

HARRY Why canna I? You make a liar an' a swine of *me*, an' a dam' fool of him——

NURSE Oh, come, Mr Hemstock

HARRY He is a little fool—an' wants to boss everybody else wi' it, an' a'——

NURSE You ought not to speak of the Baron like that

HARRY No, it's all palaver, an' smooth talk I'll see anybody in hell before I'm fed wi' mealy-mouthed words like a young pigeon

NURSE I think you don't know what you're talking about

HARRY Dunna I though, but I do I'm not going to be made a convenience of, an' then buttered up, like a trussed fowl

NURSE There is no one wants to butter you up, to my knowledge

HARRY Alright, then—then there isn't

NURSE And all this, I think, has been very uncalled for—and unnecessary

HARRY Alright, then—an' it has But I'm not a kid, nor to be treated like one——

NURSE It's there you make your mistake

HARRY Nay, it's somebody else as, had made a mistake

NURSE Yes—we do think the quiet vessels are the full ones But it seems they only want shaking to rattle worse than any

HARRY Alright Say what you like^a

NURSE Thank you, I don't wish to say any more, except that I pity whoever has you, for you seem to be in a state of chronic bad temper

HARRY Alright—I'll be going

SUSY Don't, I should be scared to death You'll stop five minutes,
Nurse

NURSE A quarter of an hour

SUSY (*staring*) What's that?

NURSE (*going to the door*) It's only Patty

SUSY She's been that lost a' day without our Harry

NURSE Poor old Patty!

Enter HARRY

SUSY Tha'rt a bit sooner than I thought fer

HARRY (*surlily*) Am I?

SUSY I hanna been able to get thee no dinner

HARRY Why?

SUSY She on'y died at two o'clock—an' we've been busy ever
sin', haven't we, Nurse?

NURSE We have, Mrs Smalley

SUSY Shall ter ha'e tea wi' me an' Nurse?

HARRY No

SUSY What then?

HARRY Nowt

SUSY Shall ter wesh thyssen?

HARRY Ha

SUSY Pump wor frozen this mornin'—

HARRY I know

SUSY fetches a large red pancheon from outside, puts in cold water, brings towel and soap, setting all on a stool on hearth-rug HARRY sets tin bottle and knotted snap-bag on table, takes off his cap, red wool scarf, coat, and waistcoat He pours hot water from boiler into pancheon, strips off his singlet or vest—he wears no shirt—and kneels down to wash NURSE and SUSY sit down to tea

NURSE (*to HARRY*) You must be tired to-day (*No answer*)

SUSY I bet his hands is sore—are they? (*No answer*) Best leave
him alone—they always grumble about their hands, first day

HARRY Wheer's my Dad?

SUSY Gone to registrar's.

NURSE Yes, they must take some time to harden

SUSY Shall you sit there, Nurse? I'd better light the lamp, you
can't see

HARRY Tha nedna

SUSY What's thaigh to stop me for?

NURSE No—I like the twilight—really

SUSY There's a lot o' dirt wi' a collier—an' mess

NURSE Yes

SUSY I allers said I'd not marry one I'd had enough wi' my father
an' th' lads

NURSE They say it's clean dirt

SUSY Is it? Muck an' mess, to my thinkin'

NURSE Yes, I suppose so I used to think it would be dreadful

SUSY But you've altered

NURSE Well, I've thought about it—I'm afraid I should never
fit in

SUSY No—you're too much of a lady—you like a lady's ways

NURSE I don't know Perhaps one does get a bit finicky after a
certain time

SUSY (to HARRY) Dost want thy back don'?

*He grunts assent She washes his back with a flannel, and
wipes it as she talks*

NURSE It's the thought of it day after day, day after day—it is
rather appalling

SUSY The thought of any man, like that, is

NURSE (smiling) It was not the man—it was the life—the com-
pany one would have to keep

SUSY Yes So you wouldn't marry a collier, Nurse?

NURSE Yes, I would—for all that If I cared for him

SUSY That makes the difference

NURSE It does

SUSY I can't imagine you married to a collier

NURSE Sometimes it seems mad, to me, sometimes it doesn't

SUSY I shouldn't ha' thought, though, Nurse, you'd ha' had
one——

NURSE No? I might

SUSY Not an old one?

NURSE Certainly not an old one Not Mr Wilcox

SUSY Ha Have another cup? I wish Patty would keep still She
fair worrits me I'm sure I'd like to drop your cup, she made me
jump that much

NURSE I am surprised you are nervous

SUSY We all are I wonder, Nurse, where my mother's will is?

NURSE Oh—I meant to have told you In the socket of the bed-post nearest the drawers, at the top

SUSY Would you believe it!

NURSE She was very quaint sometimes Poor Mrs Hemstock

SUSY Do you think she was in her right mind?

NURSE Oh, yes—and Doctor does, too

SUSY Well—I used to have my doubts

NURSE Poor Mrs Hemstock

A knock

SUSY Oh!

RACHEL (*entering*) I thought there was nobody in, seeing no light
Is Nurse here?

NURSE Yes

RACHEL The Baroness wants you to go up, she's got a pain I've been to your place for you

NURSE Poor Baroness! What is the matter?

RACHEL She's got a pain in her shoulder

NURSE Rheumatism?

RACHEL She says she believes it's pleurisy

NURSE (*smiling*) Poor old Baroness, she *does* fancy

RACHEL But she won't pay for a doctor, fancy or no fancy, not if she can help it Her fancy mustn't cost her anything

NURSE She knows I can treat her I can go straight there

RACHEL Oh, an' will you go an' see what's up with my father?
He's not been to work—been in bed all day—can't eat—won't have the doctor—fading away—

NURSE That is sad! What ails him?

RACHEL I don't know—Minnie's been up for me Says he feels hot inside, an' believes he's got an inflammation

NURSE I'll call if I have time I must go

RACHEL He's done nothing but ask were his eyes bloodshot, and would Minnie be frightened if he turned delirious She's frit—
an' I can't go down—

NURSE I will call Good night, everybody

Exit NURSE

SUSY I must light the lamp

RACHEL I didn't hear till four o'clock as she'd gone Was she unconscious?

SUSY Yes, all day

RACHEL (*to HARRY—who is struggling into his shirt*) And was you at work? Fancy, you been at home all this time, then it to happen the first day you was away Things do happen cruel

SUSY Shall you give him his tea, while I go an' see to my lad?

RACHEL I mustn't be long

SUSY *goes out*

What shall you have?

HARRY Nowt

RACHEL Oh, you must 'ave somethink Just a cup of tea, if nothing else Come on—come an' sit here See, it's waiting You must be fair sinkin' after bein' at work all day I've thought of you every minute, I'm sure I've heard the driving engines shuddering every time, an' I've thought of you (*She cuts bread and toasts it*) They say you're hard, but they don't know (*Suspicion of tears*) I used to think myself as you was a kid, a frightened bit of a rabbit—but I know different now (*She cries*) I know what you've had to go through—an' I've been a cat to you, I have I know what you've felt—as if you was pushed up against a wall, an' all the breath squeezed out of you—her dyin' by inches—an' I've been a cat to you (*She butters the toast*)

HARRY Tha needna do that for me

RACHEL Yes, do eat a bit—you'll be sinkin' I've had no tea—I'll eat a bit with you, if you will (*She sits down, drinks tea, and eats a little*) You know I've fair hated myself—I've wished I was dead But I needn't talk about myself Are your hands sore?

HARRY A bit

RACHEL I knew they must be—because you've worked like a horse, I know you have, to stop thinking I can see you're dog-tired Let me look (*She takes his hand*) Fair raw! (*Melting into tears*)

You don't care a bit about yourself, you don't, an' it's not fair

HARRY Tha hasna bothered thyself above thy boot-tops

RACHEL I know I haven't Oh, I was jealous of your mother, 'cause I knowed you was fonder of her—

HARRY Tha nedna—(*She weeps—he hides his face*)

RACHEL I s'll never forgive myself—

HARRY Dunna—

RACHEL, *sobbing, goes to him, takes his head on her bosom, and rocks it*

RACHEL An' I've been such a cat to thee, Harry

HARRY (*putting his arms round her waist*) I've not seen her for two days

RACHEL Never mind, never mind She's been wandering—never mind

HARRY Now 'er's gone

RACHEL Never mind, we s'll die ourselves someday, we shall I know tha loved her, better than me—tha allers would—I know But let me be wi' thee (*She sits down on his knee*) Let me stop wi' thee, tha wants somebody An' I care for nowt but thee—tha knows I do

HARRY Should we go an' look at her?

RACHEL (*kissing him*) We will (*She kisses him again*) Tha's been like a bird on a frozen pond, tha has Tha's been frozen out—

HARRY Rachel?

RACHEL What?

HARRY Dunna kiss me yet—

RACHEL No—I won't—I won't

HARRY Afterwards—

RACHEL Yes, I know—I know (*Silence a moment*) Come then, we'll go an' look at her

She lights a candle, takes his hand They go into the front room

Enter SUSY

SUSY Where are they? I'd think they've carted off an' left th' house empty (*Calls*) Rachel! Oh my goodness! Harry!

Enter RACHEL and HARRY, both with red eyes, from the sick-room

Oh, here you are

RACHEL Yes Did you think I'd gone?

HARRY *pulls on his coat and goes out*

SUSY Yes—you said you was in a hurry

RACHEL I shall have to be goin'

SUSY I wish my father would come Is he grumpy yet?

RACHEL Harry? No, he's not grumpy, no

SUSY What? Have you made it up?

RACHEL There was nothing to make

SUSY I'm glad to hear it What about Job Arthur?

RACHEL I never did care a bit about him or anybody else—

SUSY No, but——

RACHEL Well, but what?

SUSY Has he asked you? Has he promised you? Our Harry?

RACHEL Yes, not in words—but I know

SUSY You don't Nurse wants him, an' Nurse'll get him

RACHEL She won't

SUSY You see

RACHEL Don't you fret your fat He's not that easy to grab

SUSY But he's got a fancy for Nurse He's as proud as they make
'em, an' it would just suit him to crow over us, marryin' a lady

RACHEL A lady!

SUSY Well, you know what I mean An' I believe there's summat
in the will for her My mother harped on her an' our Harry——

RACHEL An' does she know?

SUSY She's not far off o' guessin', I'll be bound She is a deep one,
Nurse is

RACHEL She is Oh, she'd soon know everything if she got a sniff
An' has your father got the will?

SUSY No, it's in the front room

RACHEL Well—you should get it, an' see what it says You should
come in for something, and then——

SUSY Durst you come with me?

RACHEL Yes, I durst come

SUSY Should us then?

RACHEL Yes, let us You could burn it if there was owt you didn't
like

SUSY Durst you get it? (*She lights a candle*)

RACHEL Yes, if you'll show me

They go into the next room

SUSY'S VOICE Doesn't it smell cold a'ready Oh!

RACHEL'S VOICE It does

SUSY'S VOICE Look, you want to get on this table This blessed
candle does jump

RACHEL'S VOICE I could ha' sworn tha sheet moved

*A shriek from SUSY—shrieks from RACHEL—a bump—more
shrieks SUSY rushes across the kitchen out of doors In a
moment HARRY appears in the outer doorway RACHEL flies
blindly into him*

HARRY Whatever's up?

RACHEL Oh Harry! Oh Harry!

HARRY Well—what's up? What's ter got in thy hand?

RACHEL Oh, whatever was it? Let's go

HARRY What wor that? What!

He starts as Patty walks mildly from the front room

It wor nowt but our Patty

RACHEL I thought I should have died

HARRY What wor ther doin'?

RACHEL I fell off that table Oh, and I have brüised my arm

HARRY What wor you doin'? What's this?

SUSY (*entering*) Oh Rachel!

RACHEL It was only Patty

SUSY Did you get it? Oh, look at our Harry opening it!

HARRY Why, it's th' will I sh'd ha' thought you'd have more about you—— (*He reads*)

SUSY What's it say?

HARRY Look for thysen, if tha'rt in such a mighty hurry

SUSY (*reading*) Five hundred and fifty pounds for him and Nurse Broadbanks if they marry—an' if not, to be divided between me an' him What did I say! Would you credit, now? But there's one thing, Nurse won't *have* him

RACHEL He doesn't want her

HARRY She's worth a million such as you, cats as wants nowt but to lap at a full saucer You couldna let her lie quiet for five minutes, but must be after her bit of money

RACHEL Indeed, I didn't want the money

SUSY He wants it himself, an' that's what he's been contrivin' for all along—him an' that slivin' Nurse There's a pair of 'em

HARRY There's a pair of you, more like it—a couple of slitherin' cats, nowt else No more you think of her, than if she wor a dead fish wi' the money in her mouth But you shan't have it, you shan't, if I can scotch you

RACHEL Oh, Mr Sharp-shins, you think you know everything, do you? You're mistaken It's not fair, it isn't I only——

HARRY Tha needs to tell me nowt

NURSE (*entering*) Oh, you are here! The Baroness asked me to call and see where you were, Rachel

RACHEL And now you've seen, you can go back an' tell her you've been

HARRY They've been after th' will, couldna let her rest still in her own room, but what must they do, go ferretin' for her money——

SUSY Shut thy mouth, tha's said enough

HARRY That I hanna They'd claw the stuff out of her hand, if it wor there——

SUSY Hadn't we a right to see the will?

HARRY There's a lot of right about you Here, come here Give us hold of it

SUSY I shan't

HARRY What! Now, Nurse, thee read it We'n all read Now thee read it (NURSE reads) Hast got it all? Tha sees?

NURSE Yes, I understand it

HARRY An' what dost say?

NURSE I say nothing

SUSY This is what she's been working for

HARRY Then let them as has worked be paid What? I say "snip", Nurse, will tha say "snap"? Come on—"snap" me, Nuise Say "snap" Snip?

NURSE This is hardly the occasion

RACHEL He doesn't love you, Nurse This is only his tempei

NURSE I think, out of respect to the dead, we ought not to go on like this

SUSY You'll be precise and proper—all lardy-da Oh yes—but you've got what you've been aiming at, haven't you? You've worked it round very clever You see what carneyin' 'll do for you, Rachel? If you'd ha' buttered your words, you might ha' been alright

RACHEL I couldn't creep

HARRY No, you could slither, though

NURSE I'm afraid I must be going

SUSY Yes, you can smile to yourself, and hug yourself under your cloak in the dark It's worth marryin' him for, five hundred and fifty pounds

NURSE *goes out*

HARRY She's a lady, she is, an' she makes you two look small

RACHEL Well, Harry, you can think what you like about me and you always have thought me as bad as you could imagine But I only did it to help Susy—and all I've done I've done with you

5TH MOURNER Well, women like that sort

Exit 4TH and 5TH MOURNERS

MR HEMSTOCK I allers thought 'er'd a worn widow's weeds for me—

HARRY Dost wish it wor that road about?

MR HEMSTOCK 'Nay, I non know—

HARRY Aie ter stoppin'?

MR HEMSTOCK I want ter speak ter Nurse

HARRY I'm goin' then

MR HEMSTOCK Dunna thee—tha wait a bit

HARRY Nay

Exit HARRY

BAKER (*in very genteel black*) Good morning, Mr Hemstock

MR HEMSTOCK Good morning

BAKER We got more than we bargained for

MR HEMSTOCK Yes, a bit surprisin'

BAKER I'm going to strike—Nurse for a mother-in-law is too much for a good thing Why, bless me, you want to be careful what relatives you have—some you can't help—but a mother-in-law, you can

MR HEMSTOCK I want to speak to Nurse

MR WILCOX (*frock-coated*) You've 'ad a big loss, Mr Hemstock—I've been through it myself, so I know what it is

BAKER Here, I say, Hezekiah—I don't mind you for a father-in-law—

MR WILCOX Hello, Job Arthur! Well, I never! I am surprised, I can tell you

BAKER So'm I

MR WILCOX But it's a glad surprise—I'd rather say "My son" to you, Job Arthur—

BAKER Hold on a bit, Hezekiah, you've always stood me as a good uncle, let's leave it at that

MR WILCOX I'll make you a wedding present of it, Job Arthur—that little thing, you know

BAKER I do, worse luck! I've pledged my soul and my honour to you, uncle, my uncle, on the pop-shop side, but my body's my ewe lamb—I don't sell Good morning, Dr Foules

DR FOULES Good morning Ei—excuse me—but Nurse Broadbanks has not gone yet?

BAKER Not yet, Doctor Here's her husband—that-is-to-be waiting for her

DR FOULES Ha!

MR WILCOX Nurse has not gone yet, Doctor

DR FOULES Thank you

BAKER Let's have a look! (*He peeps into the church*) Oh—oh Baron, may I speak to you?

Enter BARON, in surplice, with BARONESS and NURSE

BARON And you, what have you to say?

BAKER Not much Only there's a bit of an alteration wants makin' Rachel's given me the sack

BARON I do not understand, sir

BARONESS He wishes to escape from his promise He wishes to dodge Rachel

BARON You, sir, have you not given your word?

BAKER And you're welcome keep it, for what it's worth But you can't cork a woman's promise, Baroness In short, Baron—and Mr Wilcox—Rachel has asked to be released from her engagement—hem!—with me—and I have felt it my duty to release her (*He bows*)

BARON It is an indignity to the Church It is insult to the Holy Church

BARONESS I do not believe this man It is his ruse to escape from a bond

MR WILCOX Yes, my lady, that's what it is—my poor girl—Nurse! Nurse?

NURSE Let Rachel come herself

BARONESS She shall

BARON (*to MR HEMSTOCK*) Go and bring Rachel here

MR HEMSTOCK (*shrugging*) Where am I to go?

NURSE Please, Mr Hemstock .

He goes

BARON Sir, I believe you are a scoundrel

BAKER I wouldn't deny it, Baron

MR WILCOX No—we know him too ell—he'd better not begin denyin'

NURSE This is the man, Baron—the—the—the Wilcox

BARON What! What!

BARONESS What do you mean, you old wicked man, insulting Nurse in this fashion?

BARON You—you—you, *sir*! If you speak I will cut you down
The double shame, the double blasphemy! Ah! Leave from my sight—go—don't stir, *sir*, till you answer

DR FOULES May I ask, Nurse, if I am to congratulate you on your banns?

NURSE I should think you have no need to ask I am ready to die I am so mortified and ashamed

BAKER Hello—I am only the mote in the eye of the Church am I? Oh uncle, uncle!

DR FOULES Then it is a mistake?

NURSE Woise It is a mean, base contrivance to trap me I knew nothing of these banns—I could have dropped He knows I wouldn't marry him—no, not if—not if——

BAKER You died in a ditch with your shoes on I'm undone this time, curse it Uncle, have a pound of flesh, will you, instead? I could spare a pound and a half, cut judiciously

BARON What do you say, *sir*?

BAKER I'm inviting him to have his pound of flesh, instead of his two hundred pounds of money Though it's dear meat, I own

NURSE What do you mean, Mr Bowers?

BAKER I owe him £180, and he'll foreclose on our house in a couple of months Then goodbye my bakery, and they cart my old mother to a lunatic asylum, though she's no more mad than I am

BARONESS And what have you done with the money?

BAKER Paid some of my debts, Baroness—and some of it I have—as it were, eaten So in a pound of flesh he'd get his money glorified

BARON What do you say, *sir*?

MR WHICOX I say nothing

CURTAIN

SCENE II

The vicarage garden wall, under which runs the path RACHEL looks over the wall, enter HARRY

RACHEL All by yourself? Where's the others?

HARRY Stopping

RACHEL Did they give my father's banns out?

HARRY His'n an' thine

RACHEL What! Mine! Why, I told Job Arthur as I wouldn't have him

HARRY 'Appen so

RACHEL I did An' he's never told the Baron Whatever shall I do?

HARRY What?

RACHEL You don't believe as I told him

HARRY I believe nowt

RACHEL But I did, an' he's agreed And did they ask my father and Nurse?

HARRY Yes

RACHEL Oh—but I shan't have him—I shan't The Baron'll give it me—but I shan't have him You needn't believe me, if you don't want to

HARRY When did ter tell Job Arthur?

RACHEL Yesterday An' he was glad He doesn't really care for me

HARRY Are ter having me on?

RACHEL May I be struck dead this minute if I am

HARRY An' what shall ter do?

RACHEL I don't know—go to Derby Perhaps I'll learn to be a nurse

HARRY She's marryin' thy father

RACHEL (*melting into tears*) Don't—tha's hurt me enough (*Dashing away her tears*) Well, I must go in and see to the dinner Then I'll tell the Baron, and have my head bitten off (*She turns to go*)

HARRY Are ter sure tha told Job Arthur?

RACHEL Go and ask him

HARRY There's no tellin' what tha does

RACHEL No—there isn't—for the simple reason that I've built my house on the sand

HARRY How dost mean?

RACHEL You know right enough Well, I'll go an' warm th' rice pudding up

HARRY Rachel—dost care for me?

RACHEL You'll make me wild in a minute

HARRY Rachel—dunna go—it's that lonely

RACHEL I s'll have to go and put that pudding in

HARRY Come down here first—a minute

RACHEL Come you up here

HARRY (*climbing up*) Rachel

RACHEL What?

HARRY It seems that quiet-like—dunna go an' leave me, I go rum-magin' down i' the loose ground, to look at th' coffin

RACHEL Do you?

HARRY I do I feel as if I should have to get at her an' mak' her speak I canna stand this dead o'night quiet

RACHEL No

HARRY Comin' out of church into this sunshine's like goin' in a cinematograph show Things jumps about in a flare of light, an' you expect it every minute to go out an' be pitch dark All the shoutin' an' singin', an' yet there's a sort of quiet Rachel

RACHEL Never mind—it will be so for a bit

HARRY I canna be by myself, though, I canna

RACHEL There are plenty of people

HARRY Nay, I non want 'em

RACHEL Only Nurse

HARRY Nor her neither—never

RACHEL 'Appen so

HARRY Tha doesna believe me?

RACHEL "I believe nowt "

HARRY I wish I may drop dead this minute if I ever did care for her

RACHEL (*smiling*) You *thought* you did?

HARRY 'Appen I did think so

RACHEL I know you did

HARRY But 'er knows nowt about me, like thee

RACHEL No

HARRY Shall ter ha'e me, Rachel?

RACHEL You want me?

HARRY Let us be married afore the week's out, Rachel Dunna leave me by mysen

RACHEL Are you in a hurry now, at the last pinch?

HARRY Shall ter, Rachel?

RACHEL Yes (*He kisses her*)

MR HEMSTOCK (*entering*) I should ha thought you'd more about you than to be kissin' there where everybody can see you—an' to-day

RACHEL There's nobody but you

MR HEMSTOCK You don't know who there is

RACHEL And I don't care We're going to be married directly

MR HEMSTOCK It'll look nice, that will—his mother buried yesterday

HARRY It ma'es no difference to her, does it?

MR HEMSTOCK Tha'rt a fawce un, Rachel Tha's contrived it, after a' Tha'rt a fawce un, an' no mistake But tha's got to come to the Baron

RACHEL What for?

MR HEMSTOCK Nay, dunna ask me Tha'd better look sharp Ma'e thy heels crack

RACHEL What's up now, I wonder?

They go out

CURTAIN

SCENE III

The church porch

BARON Do not speak, sir You have vilified me, you have held up the Church to ridicule

MR WILCOX I can speak, can't I?

BARON Do not speak, you shall not, do not speak We will not hear your voice You are a blasphemer

MR WILCOX I can't see but what a Methodist's as good as a Church, whatever What have I done, what have I done?

BARONESS What have you done!

MR WILCOX Whatever anybody says, there's nobody can say I've never done anything as wan't right

BARON What, sir, what——

BAKER Here's Rachel

SUSY I'll bet it's her doin's She's the deepest I ever met, bar none

BARON Rachel?

RACHEL Yes, Baron

BARON Who wrote to see the letter of the banns for your father and Nurse?

MR WILCOX I did

BARON Scoundrel! Impostor!

NURSE You had not the slightest justification for it

DR FOULES Surely, Nurse, you are flattered A woman loves a peremptory wooing

MR WILCOX You accepted me on Friday night, Nurse, you know you did

NURSE I did no such thing

BAKER Now, Rachel, speak up I say you've refused me——

RACHEL So I have

BAKER Of course And I forgot to take the banns back

RACHEL That's your lookout

BARON Rachel! Ah, insolent!

BAKER Now, my case settled—did Nurse accept your father? Of course not

RACHEL She did

MR WILCOX There you are

NURSE I did not I would not demean myself I did not

BARONESS This is very funny, Nurse

BARON I have spoken the banns

MR WILCOX Come now, Nurse

NURSE You horrid, hateful old man You know you worked yourself into a state, I thought you were delirious, and I had to promise anything

MR WILCOX A promise is a promise

SUSY Of all the deep-uns, Rachel, you cap all

RACHEL What's it to do with me?

NURSE You pestered and pestered and pestered me

DR FOULES All's fair in love and war, Nurse

BARON What were the exact words?

RACHEL "Yes, yes I'll marry you—if you'll settle down now and go to sleep"

NURSE Why! What! You are an underhand thing

RACHEL What if I did happen to hear?

NURSE You were listening!

RACHEL I could hear it all

NURSE How hateful, how hateful!

BARON I do not understand—explain

NURSE He was shamming——

MR WILCOX She's had me on a string——

RACHEL She's sniffed at him for months, wondering whether or not to lick him up

DR FOULES The debatable tit-bit

BARON I will understand this matter Speak, Nurse

NURSE He shammed fever, delirium—and to comfort him, to soothe him, I said I would marry him I thought he was raving And I would not marry him—I'd rather beg in the streets

MR WILCOX Oh, but Nurse, Nurse, look here

BARON Silence, sir, silence You are a base, malingering pulamiting wretch

RACHEL Well, she came to see him often enough, and stopped long enough——

BARONESS You cannot, Baron, blame the man for everything

DR FOULES A man who was delirious in fever on Friday night would hardly be disporting himself at church on Sunday morning——

MR WILCOX I'm not disporting myself

BARONESS I don't know It's not much, and there are still miracles

DR FOULES Surely miracles are not wasted on—Methodists, Baroness?

BARONESS I do not know—I do not know Rachel, did you put the pudding to warm?

RACHEL Yes'm

BARONESS Then it's burnt to a cinder

BARON You, sir, you Wilcox, are a base scoundrel

MR WILCOX She shall pay for this

NURSE I must have it contradicted—I must

BAKER I will contradict it, Nurse

A Collier's Friday Night

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

(About 1909 – first published 1934)

CHARACTERS

MRS LAMBERT
LAMBERT
NELLIE LAMBERT
ERNEST LAMBERT
MAGGIE PEARSON
GERTIE COOMBER
BEATRICE WYLD
BARKER
CARLIN

The action of the play takes place in the kitchen of the Lamberts' house

ACT I

The kitchen or living-room of a working-man's house At the back the fireplace, with a large fire burning On the left, on the oven side of the stove, a WOMAN of some fifty-five years sits in a wooden rocking-chair, reading Behind her and above her, in the recess made by the fireplace, four shelves of books, the shelf-covers being of green serge, with woollen ball fringe, and the books being ill-assorted school books, with an edition of Lessing, florid in green and gilt, but tarnished On the left, a window looking on a garden where the rain is dripping through the first twilight Under the window, a sofa, the bed covered with red chintz By the side of the window, on the wall near the ceiling, a quiver clothes-horse is outspread with the cotton articles which have been ironed, hanging to air Under the outspread clothes is the door which communicates with the scullery and with the yard On the right side of the fireplace, in the recess equivalent to that where the bookshelves stand, a long narrow window, and below it, a low, brown, fixed cupboard, whose top forms a little sideboard, on which stand a large black enamel box of oil-colours, and a similar japanned box of water-colours, with Reeve's silver trade-mark There is also on the cupboard top a tall glass jar containing ragged pink chrysanthemums On the right is a bookcase upon a chest of drawers This piece of furniture is of stained polished wood in imitation of mahogany The upper case is full of books, seen through the two flimsy glass doors a large set of the World's Famous Literature in dark green at the top—then on the next shelf prize-books in calf and gold, and imitation soft leather poetry-books, and a Nuttall's dictionary and Cassell's French, German and Latin dictionaries On each side of the bookcase are prints from water-colours, large, pleasing and well framed in oak Between the little brown cupboard and the bookcase, an arm-chair, small, round, with many little staves, a comfortable chair such as is seen in many working-class kitchens, it has a red chintz cushion There is

another Windsor chair on the other side of the bookcase Over the mantelpiece, which is high, with brass candlesticks and two "Coronation" tumblers in enamel, hangs a picture of Venice, from one of Stead's Christmas Numbers—nevertheless, satisfactory enough

The WOMAN in the rocking-chair is dressed in black, and wears a black sateen apron She wears spectacles, and is reading The New Age Now and again she looks over her paper at a piece of bread which stands on a hanging bar before the fire, propped up by a fork, toasting There is a little pile of toast on a plate on the boiler hob beside a large saucepan, the kettle and a brown teapot are occupying the oven-top near the WOMAN The table is laid for tea, with four large breakfast-cups in dark-blue willow-pattern, and plates similar It is an oval mahogany table, large enough to seat eight comfortably The WOMAN sees the piece of bread smoking, and takes it from the fire She butters it and places it on the plate on the hob, after which she looks out of the window, then, taking her paper, sits down again in her place

SOMEONE passes the long narrow window only the head being seen, then quite close to the large window on the left There is a noise as the outer door opens and is shut then the kitchen door opens, and a GIRL enters She is tall and thin, and wears a long grey coat and a large blue hat, quite plain After glancing at the table, she crosses the room, drops her two exercise-books on the wooden chair by the bookcase, saying

NELLIE LAMBERT Oh! I am weary

MOTHER You are late

NELLIE I know I am It's Agatha Karton—she is a great gaby There's always something wrong with her register, and old Tommy gets in such a fever, the great kid

She takes off her hat, and going to the door on right, stands in the doorway, hanging it up with her coat on the pegs in the passage, just by the doorway

And I'm sure the youngsters have been regular little demons I could have killed them

MOTHER I've no doubt they felt the same towards you, poor little wretches

NELLIE (*with a short laugh*) I'll bet they did, for I spanked one or two of 'em, well

MOTHER Trust you, trust you! You'll be getting the mothers if you're not careful

NELLIE (*contemptuously*) I had one old cat this afternoon But I told her straight I said "If your Johnny, or Sammy, or whatever he is, is a nuisance, he'll be smacked, and there's an end of it" She was mad, but I told her straight, I didn't care She can go to Tommy if she likes I know he'll fuss her round, but I'll tell him too Pah! he fusses the creatures up!—I would!

She comes towards the table, pushing up her hair with her fingers It is heavy and brown, and has been flattened by her hat She glances at herself in the little square mirror which hangs from a nail under the right end of the mantelpiece, a mere, unconscious glance which betrays no feeling, and is just enough to make her negligently touch her hair again She turns a trifle fretfully to the table

NELLIE Is there only potted meat? You know I can't bear it

MOTHER (*conciliatorily*) Why, I thought you'd like it, a raw day like this—and with toast

NELLIE You know I don't Why didn't you get some fruit?—a little tin of apricots——

MOTHER I thought you'd be sick of apricots—I know Ernest is

NELLIE Well, I'm not—you know I'm not Pappy potted meat!

She sits down on the sofa wearily Her MOTHER pours out two cups of tea, and replaces the pot on the hob

MOTHER Won't you have some, then?

NELLIE (*petulantly*) No, I don't want it

The MOTHER stands irresolute a moment, then she goes out NELLIE reaches over to the bookshelves and takes a copy of The Scarlet Pimpernel, which she opens on the table, and reads, sipping her tea but not eating In a moment or two she glances up, as the MOTHER passes the window and enters the scullery There is the sound of the opening of a tin

NELLIE Have you fetched some?—Oh, you are a sweetling!

The MOTHER enters, with a little glass dish of small tinned apricots They begin tea

MOTHER Polly Goddard says her young man got hurt in the pit this morning

He drags up his arm-chair and sits down at the table full in front of the fire

an yer got a drink for me?

The MOTHER comes and pours out a cup of tea, then goes back to the scullery

[It's a nice thing as a man as comes home from th' pit parched up canna ha'e a drink got 'im (He speaks disagreeably)]

MOTHER Oh, you needn't begin! I know you've been stopping, drinking

FATHER Dun yer?—Well, yer know too much, 'then You wiser than them as knows, you are!

There is a general silence, as if the three listeners were shrugging their shoulders in contempt and anger The FATHER pours out his tea into his saucer, blows it and sucks it up NELLIE looks up from her book and glowers at him with ferocity GERTIE puts her hand before her mouth and giggles behind his back at the noise He does not drink much, but sets the cup back in the saucer and lays his grimed arms wearily along the table The MOTHER enters with a plate of cabbage

MOTHER Here, that's a clean cloth

She does not speak unkindly

FATHER (*brutally*) You should put a dotty (duty) 'un on, then

The MOTHER takes a newspaper and spreads it over the cloth before him She kneels at the oven, takes out a stew-jar, and puts meat and gravy on the plate with the cabbage, and sets it before him He does not begin at once to eat The MOTHER puts back her chair against the wall and sits down

MOTHER Are your trousers wet?

FATHER (*as he eats*) A bit

MOTHER Then why don't you take them off?

FATHER (*in a tone of brutal authority*) Fetch my breeches an' wa's'coat down, Nellie

NELLIE (*continuing to read, her hands pushed in among her hair*)

You can ask me properly

The FATHER pushes his beard forward and glares at her with futile ferocity She reads on GERTIE COOMBER, at the back, shifts from one foot to the other, then coughs behind her hand as if she had a little cold The MOTHER rises and goes out by door on right

FATHER You lazy, idle bitch, you let your mother go!

NELLIE (*shrugging her shoulders*) You can shut up (*She speaks with cold contempt*)

GERTIE *sighs audibly* The tension of the scene will not let her run home NELLIE looks up, flushed, carefully avoiding her father

NELLIE Aren't you going to sit down, Gert?

GERTIE No, I'm off

NELLIE Wait a bit and I'll come across with you I don't want to stop here

The FATHER stirs in his chair with rage at the implication. The MOTHER comes downstairs and enters with a pair of black trousers, from which the braces are trailing, and a black waistcoat lined with cream and red lining. She drops them against her husband's chair.

MOTHER (*kindly, trying to restore the atmosphere*) Aren't you going to sit down, Gertie? Go on the stool

GERTIE takes a small stool on the right side of fireplace, and sits toying with the bright brass tap of the boiler. The MOTHER goes out again on right, and enters immediately with five bread tins and a piece of lard paper. She stands on the hearth-rug greasing the tins. The FATHER kicks off his great boots and stands warming his trousers before the fire, turning them and warming them thoroughly.

GERTIE Are they cold, Mr Lambert?

FATHER They are that! Look you, they steaming like a sweating hoss

MOTHER Get away, man! The driest thing in the house would smoke if you held it in front of the fire like that

FATHER (*shortly*) Ah, I know I'm a liar I knowed it to begin wi'

NELLIE (*much irritated*) Isn't he a nasty-tempered kid!

GERTIE But those front bedrooms are clammy

FATHER (*gratified*) They h'are, Gertie, they h'are

GERTIE (*turning to avoid NELLIE'S contempt and pottering the fire*)

I know the things I bring down from ours, they fair damp in a day

FATHER They h'are, Gertie, I know it! And I wonder how 'er'd like to clap 'er arse into wet breeches

He goes scrambling off to door on right, trailing his breeches

NELLIE (*fiercely*) Father!

GERTIE puts her face into her hands and laughs with a half-audible laugh that shakes her body

I can't think what you've got to laugh at, Gertie Coomber

The MOTHER, glancing at her irate daughter, laughs also. She moves aside the small wooden rocking-chair, and, drawing forth a great panchion of dough from the corner under the book-shelves, begins to fill the bread tins. She sets them on the hearth—which has no fender, the day being Friday, when the steel fender is put away, after having been carefully cleaned to be saved for Saturday afternoon. The FATHER enters, the braces of his trousers dangling, and drops the heavy mole-skin pit breeches in corner on right

NELLIE I wonder why you can't put them in the scullery, the smell of them's hateful

FATHER You mun put up wi' it, then. If you were i' th' pit you'd niver put your nose up at them again

He sits down and recommences eating. The sound further irritates his daughter, who again pushes her fingers into her hair, covering her ears with her palms. Her father notices and his manners become coarser. NELLIE rises, leaving her book open on the table

NELLIE Come on, Gert! (*She speaks with contemptuous impatience*)

The FATHER watches them go out. He lays his arms along the newspaper, wearily

FATHER I'm too tired ter h'eat

MOTHER (*sniffing, and hardening a little*) I wonder why you always have to go and set her off in a tantrum as soon as you come in

FATHER A cheeky bitch, 'er wants a good slap at th' side o' th' mouth!

MOTHER (*incensed*) If you've no more sense than that, I don't wonder——

FATHER You don't wonder—you don't wonder! No, I know you don't wonder. It's you, as eggs 'em on against me, both on em

MOTHER (*scornfully*) You set them against yourself. You do your best for it, every time they come in

FATHER Do I, do I! I set 'em against me, do I? I'm going to stand 'em orderin' me about, an' turnin' their noses up, am I?

MOTHER You shouldn't make them turn their noses up, ther. If you do your best for it, what do you expect?

FATHER A jumped-up monkey! An' it's you as 'as made 'em like it, the pair on 'em There's neither of 'em but what treats me like a dog I'm not daft! I'm not blind! I can see it ✓

MOTHER If you're so clever at seeing it, I should have thought you'd have sense enough not to begin it and carry it on as you do

FATHER Me begin it! When do I begin it? You niver hear me say a word to 'em, till they've snapped at me as if I was a—as if I was a—— No, it's you as puts 'em on in It's you, you blasted——

He bangs the table with his fist The MOTHER puts the bread in the oven, from which she takes a rice pudding, then she sits down to read He glares across the table, then goes on eating After a little while he pushes the plate from him The MOTHER affects not to notice for a moment

'An yer got any puddin'?

MOTHER Have you finished?

She rises, takes a plate and, crouching on the hearth, gives him his pudding She glances at the clock, and clears the tea-things from her daughter's place She puts another piece of toast down, there remaining only two pieces on the plate

FATHER (*looking at the rice pudding*) Is this what you'n had?

MOTHER No, we had nothing

FATHER No, I'll bet you non 'ad this baby pap

MOTHER No, I had nothing for a change, and Nellie took her dinner

FATHER (*eating unwillingly*) Is there no other puddin' as you could 'a made?

MOTHER Goodness, man, are you so mightily particular about your belly? This is the first rice pudding you've had for goodness knows how long, and—— No, I couldn't make any other In the first place, it's Friday, and in the second, I'd nothing to make it with

FATHER You wouldna ha'e, not for me But if you 'a wanted——

MOTHER (*interrupting*) You needn't say any more The fact of

the matter is, somebody's put you out at the pit, and you come home to vent your spleen on us

FATHER (*shouting*) You're a liar, you're a liar! A man comes home after a hard day's work to folks as 'as never a word to say to 'im, 'as shuts up the minute 'e enters the house, as 'ates the sight of 'im—as soon as 'e comes in th' room——!

MOTHER (*with fierceness*) We've had quite enough, we've had quite enough! Our Ernest'll be in in a minute and we're not going to have this row going on, he's coming home all the way from Derby, trailing from college to a house like this, tired out with study and all this journey we're not going to have it, I tell you

Her husband stares at her dumbly, betwixt anger and shame and sorrow, of which an undignified rage is predominant. The MOTHER carries out some pots to the scullery, re-enters, takes the slice of toast and butters it

FATHER It's about time as we had a light on it, I canna see what I'm eatin'

The MOTHER puts down the toast on the hob, and having fetched a dustpan from the scullery, goes out on right to the cellar to turn on the gas and to bring coals. She is heard coming up the steps heavily. She mends the fire, and then lights the gas at a brass pendant hanging over the table. Directly after there enters a young man of twenty-one, tall and broad, pale, clean-shaven, with the brownish hair of the "ginger" class, which is all ruffled when he has taken off his cap, after having pulled various books from his pockets and put them on the little cupboard top. He takes off his coat at door right as his sister has done

ERNEST (*blowing slightly through pursed lips*) Phew! It is hot in here!

FATHER (*bluntly, but amiably*) Hot! It's non hot! I could do wi' it ten times hotter

MOTHER Oh, you! You've got, as I've always said, a hide like a hippopotamus. You ought to have been a salamander

FATHER Oh ah, I know tha'll ha'e summat ter say

MOTHER Is it raining now Ernest?

ERNEST Just a drizzle in the air like a thick mist

MOTHER Ay, isn't it sickening? You'd better take your boots off

ERNEST (*sitting in his sister's place on the sofa*) Oh, they're not wet

MOTHER They must be damp

ERNEST No, they're not There's a pavement all the way Here, look at my rose! One of the girls in Coll gave it me, and the tan-yard girls tried to beg it They are brazen hussies! "Gi'e's thy flower, Sorry, gi'e's thy buttonhole"—and one of them tried to snatch it They have a bobby down by the tan-yard brook every night now Their talk used to be awful, and it's so dark down there, under the trees Where's Nellie?

MOTHER In Coomers'

ERNEST Give me a bit of my paper, Father You know the leaf I want that with the reviews of books on

FATHER Nay, I know nowt about reviews o' books Here t'art Ta'e it

FATHER *hands the newspaper to his son, who takes out two leaves and hands the rest back*

ERNEST Here you are, I only want this

FATHER Nay, I non want it I mun get me washed We s'll ha'e th' men here directly

ERNEST I say, Mater, another seven-and-six up your sleeve?

MOTHER I'm sure! And in the middle of the term, too! What's it for this time?

ERNEST *Piers the Ploughman*, that piffle, and two books of *Horace Quintus Horatius Flaccus*, dear old chap

MOTHER And when have you to pay for them?

ERNEST Well, I've ordered them, and they'll come on Tuesday I'm sure I don't know what we wanted that *Piers Ploughman* for—it's sheer rot, and old Beasley could have gassed on it without making us buy it, if he'd liked Yes, I did feel wild Seven-and-sixpence!

FATHER I should non get tem, then You needna buy 'em unless you like Dunna get 'em, then

ERNEST Well, I've ordered them

FATHER If you 'anna the money you, canna 'a'e 'em, whether or not

MOTHER Don't talk nonsense If he has to have them, he has But the money you have to pay for books, and they're no good when you've done with them!—I'm sure it's really sickening, it is!

ERNEST Oh, never mind, Little, I s'll get 'em for six shillings Is it a worry, Mutterchen?

MOTHER It is, but I suppose if it has to be, it has

ERNEST Old Beasley is an old chough While he was lecturing this afternoon Arnold and Hinrich were playing nap, and the girls always write letters, and I went fast asleep

FATHER So that's what you go'n to Collige for, is it?

ERNEST (*nettled*) No, it isn't Only old Beasley's such a dry old ass, with his lectures on Burke He's a mumbling parson, so what do you expect?

The FATHER grunts, rises and fetches a clean new bucket from the scullery He hangs this on the top of the boiler, and turns on the water Then he pulls off his flannel singlet and stands stripped to the waist, watching the hot water dribble into the bucket The pail half-filled, he goes out to the scullery on left

Do you know what Professor Staynes said this morning, Mother?

He said I'd got an instinct for Latin—and you know he's one of the best fellows in England on the classics edits Ovid and what-not An instinct for Latin, he said

MOTHER (*smiling, gratified*) Well, it's a funny thing to have an instinct for

ERNEST I generally get an alpha plus That's the highest, you know Mater Prof Staynes generally gives me that

MOTHER Your grandfather was always fond of dry reading economics and history But I don't know where an instinct for Latin comes from—not from the Lamberts, that's a certainty Your Aunt Ellen would say, from the Vernons

She smiles ironically as she rises to pour him another cup of tea, taking the teapot from the hob and standing it, empty, on the father's plate

ERNEST Who are the Vernons?

MOTHER (*smiling*) It's a wonder your Aunt Ellen or your Aunt Eunice has never told you

ERNEST Well, they haven't What is it, Mutter?

MOTHER (*sniffing*) A parcel of nonsense

ERNEST Oh, go on, Ma, you are tantalizing! You hug it like any blessed girl

MOTHER Yes, your Aunt Ellen always said she would claim the peacock and thistle for her crest, if ever

ERNEST (*delighted*) The Peacock and Thistle! It sounds like the name of a pub

MOTHER My great-great-grandfather married a Lady Vernon—so they say As if it made any matter—a mere tale!

ERNEST Is it a fact though, Matoushka? Why didn't you tell us before?

MOTHER (*sniffing*) What should I repeat such—

FATHER (*shouting from the scullery, whence has come the noise of his washing*) 'An yer put that towl ter dry?

MOTHER (*muttering*) The towel's dry enough

She goes out and is heard taking the roller towel from behind the outer door She returns, and stands before the fire, holding the towel to dry ERNEST LAMBERT, having frowned and shrugged his shoulders, is reading

MOTHER I suppose you won't have that bit of rice pudding?

Her son looks up, reaches over and takes the brown dish from the hearth He begins to eat from the dish

ERNEST I went to the "Savoy" to-day

MOTHER I shouldn't go to that vegetable place I don't believe there's any substance in it

ERNEST Substance! Oh, lord! I had an asparagus omelette, I believe they called it, it was too much for me! A great stodgy thing! But I like the Savoy, generally It was—

Somebody comes running across the yard NELLIE LAMBERT enters with a rush

NELLIE Hello! have you done?

FATHER (*from the scullery*) Are you going to shut that doo-ar! (*Shouting*)

NELLIE (*with a quick shrug of the shoulders*) It is shut (*brightly, to her brother*) Who brought this rose? It'll just do for me Who gave it you?—Lois?

ERNEST (*flushing*) What do you want to know for? You're always saying "Lois" I don't care a button about Lois

NELLIE Keep cool, dear boy, keep cool

She goes flying lightly round, clearing the table The FATHER, dripping, bending forward almost double, comes hurrying from the scullery to the fire NELLIE whisks by him, her long pinafore rustling

FATHER (*taking the towel*) Ow (she) goes rushin' about, draughtin'

FATHER: Well, you've arrived, then! An' 'ow's the missis by now, Joe?

BARKER: Well, I dun know, Walter. It might be any minnit.

FATHER (*sympathetically*): Hu! We may as well set to, then, an' get it done.

They sit at the table, on the side of the fire. ERNEST LAMBERT comes in and takes an exercise-book from the shelves and begins to do algebra, using a text-book. He writes with a fountain-pen.

CARLIN: They gran' things, them fountain-pens.'

BARKER: They are that!

CARLIN: What's th' mak on it, Ernest?

ERNEST: It's an Onoto.

BARKER: Oh-ah! An' 'ow dun yer fill it? They says as it hold wi' a vacuum.

ERNEST: It's like this: you push this down, put the nib in th' ink, and then pull it out. It's a sort of a pump.

BARKER: Um! It's a canny thing, that!

CARLIN: It is an' a'.

FATHER: Yes, it's a very good idea. (*He is slightly condescending.*)

MOTHER: Look at the bread, Ernest.

ERNEST: Alright, Mater.

{ She goes upstairs, it being tacitly understood that she shall not know how much money falls to her husband's share as chief "butty" in the weekly reckoning.

BARKER: Is it counted?

FATHER: Yes. It's alright, Ernest?

ERNEST (*not looking up*): Yes.

They begin to reckon, first putting aside the wages of their day men; then the FATHER and BARKER take four-and-three-pence, as equivalent to CARLIN's rent, which has been stopped; then the FATHER gives a coin each, dividing the money in that way. It is occasionally a puzzling process and needs the Ready Reckoner from the shelf behind.

ACT II

Scene, as before the men are just finishing reckoning

BARKER and CARLIN, *talking in a mutter, put their money in their pockets* ERNEST LAMBERT *is drawing a circle with a pair of compasses* CARLIN *risés*

CARLIN Well, I might as well be shiftin'

BARKER Ay, I mun get off

Enter NELLIE, who has finished washing the pots, drying her hands on a small towel She crosses to the mirror hanging at the right extremity of the mantelpiece

CARLIN Well, Nellie!

NELLIE (*very amiably, even gaily*) Good evening, Mr Carlin Just off?

CARLIN Yes—ah mun goo

BARKER An' 'ow's th' instrument by now, Nellie?

NELLIE The instrument? Oh, the piano! Ours is a tunny old thing

Oh, yes, you're learning How are you getting on?

BARKER Oh, we keep goin' on, like 'Ave you got any fresh music?

FATHER Ah, I bet 'er 'as Ow's gerrin' some iv'ry day or tow

NELLIE I've got some Grieg—lovely! Hard, though It is funny—ever so funny

BARKER An' yer iver 'eared that piece "The Maiden's Prayer"?

NELLIE (*turning aside and laughing*) Yes Do you like it? It is pretty, isn't it?

BARKER I 'ad that for my last piece

NELLIE Did you? Can you play it?

BARKER (*with some satisfaction*) Yes, I can do it pretty fair An yer got th' piece?

NELLIE Yes Will you play it for us? Half a minute

She finishes stroking her hair up with her side-combs, and, taking the matches from the mantelpiece, leads the way to the door

Come on

FATHER Yes, step forward, Joe

BARKER goes out after NELLIE Through the open door comes the crashing sound of the miner's banging ^{through} The Maiden's Prayer on an old sharp-toned piano CARLIN stands listening, and shakes his head at the FATHER, who smiles back, glancing at the same time nervously at his son, who has buried his hands in his hair

CARLIN Well, are ter comin' down, George? (He moves towards the door)

FATHER (lighting his pipe—between the puffs) In about quarter of an hour, Fred

CARLIN Good night, then Good night, Ernest (He goes out)

The MOTHER is heard coming downstairs She glances at her son, and shuts the passage door Then she hurries to the oven and turns the bread As she moves away again her husband thrusts out his hand and gives her something

FATHER (going towards the passage door) I know it's a bad wick (He goes out)

MOTHER (counts the money he has given her, gives a little rapid clicking with her tongue on the roof of her mouth, tossing her head up once) Twenty-eight shillings! (Counts again) Twenty-eight shillings! (To her son) And what was the cheque?

ERNEST (looking up, with a frown of irritation) Eight pounds one and six, and stoppages

MOTHER And he gives me a frowsty twenty-eight and I've got his club to pay, and you a pair of boots Twenty-eight! I wonder if he thinks the house is kept on nothing I'll take good care he gets nothing extra, I will, too I knew it, though—I knew he'd been running up a nice score at the Tunns'—that's what it is There's rent, six-and-six, and clubs seven shillings, besides insurance and gas and everything else I wonder how he thinks it's done—I wonder if he thinks we live on air?

ERNEST (looking up with pain and irritation) Oh, Mater, don't bother! What's the good? If you worry for ever it won't make it any more

MOTHER (softened, conquering her distress) Oh yes, it's all very well for you, but if I didn't worry what would become of us I should like to know?

GERTIE COOMBER runs in She is wearing a large blue felt

hat and a Norfolk costume, she is carrying a round basket
From the parlour comes the sound of Grieg's Anitra's Tanz,
and then Ase's Tod, played well, with real sympathy

GERTIE (*with a little shy apprehension*) Who's in the parlour?

MOTHER It's only Mr Barker (*Smiling slightly*) He wanted to show Nellie how well he could play "The Maiden's Prayer"

GERTIE suddenly covers her mouth and laughs

GERTIE (*still laughing*) He, he! I'll bet it was a thump! Pomp!
Pomp! (*Makes a piano-thumping gesture*) Did you hear it, Ernest?

ERNEST (*not looking up*) Infernal shindy

GERTIE puts up her shoulders and giggles, looking askance
at the student who, she knows, is getting tired of interruptions
MOTHER Yes, I wish he'd go—(*almost whispering*)—and his wife
is expecting to go to bed any minute

GERTIE puts her lower lip between her teeth and looks
serious The music stops BARKER and NELLIE are heard talk-
ing, then the FATHER There is a click of boots on the tiled
passage and they enter

NELLIE What did you think of Mr Barker, Mother?—don't you
think it's good? I think it's wonderful—don't you, Ernest?

ERNEST (*grunting*) Um—it is

GERTIE COOMBER suddenly hides behind her friend and
laughs

MOTHER (*to BARKER*) Yes, I'm sure you get on wonderfully—
wonderfully—considering

BARKER Yes, ah's non done so bad, I think

FATHER Tha 'asna, Joe, tha 'asna, indeed!

MOTHER Don't forget the bag, Mr Barker—I know you'll want it

BARKER Oh, thank ye! Well, I mun goo Tha't comin' down,
George?

FATHER Yes, I'm comin' down, Joe I'll just get my top-coat on,
an' then— (*He struggles awkwardly into his overcoat*)

BARKER resumes his grey muffler

BARKER Well, good night, everybody, good night, Ernest—an'
thank yer, Missis

MOTHER I hope things will be—(*She nods significantly*)—alright

BARKER Ah, thank yer, I hope it will I expect so there's no reason
why it shouldn't Good night

ALL Good night, Mr Barker

The FATHER and BARKER go out Immediately NELLIE flings her arms round GERTIE's neck

NELLIE Saye me, Gert, save me! I thought I was done for that time I gave myself up! The poor piano! Mother, it'll want tuning now, & it never did before

MOTHER (*with slight asperity, half-amused*) It may want at it, then

GERTIE (*laughing*) You're done, Nellie, you're done brown! If it's like dropping a saucepan-lid—no—you've got to put up with it!

NELLIE I don't care It couldn't be much worse than it is, rotten old thing (*She pulls off her pinafore and hangs it over the back of a chair, then goes to the mirror, once more to arrange her hair*)

GERTIE Oh, come on, Nellie, Cornell's will be crammed

NELLIE Don't worry, my dear What are you going to fetch? Anything nice?

GERTIE No, I'm not—only bacon and cheese, they send you any stuff cat and candles—any muck!

The MOTHER takes the little stool and sits down on it on the hearthrug, lacing up her boots

MOTHER I suppose you're not going out, Ernest?

ERNEST No

✓ MOTHER Oh—so you can look after the bread There are two brown loaves at the top, they'll be about half an hour, the white one's nearly done Put the other in as soon as they come out Don't go and forget them, now

ERNEST No

MOTHER He says "No!" (*She shakes her head at him with indulgent, proud affection*)

• NELLIE (*as if casually, yet at once putting tension into the atmosphere*) Is Mag coming down?

He does not answer immediately

MOTHER I should think not! A night like this, and all the mud there is

ERNEST She said she'd come and do some French Why?

NELLIE (*with a half-smile off-handedly*) Nothing

MOTHER You'd never think she'd trapse through all this mud

NELLIE Don't bother She'd come if she had to have water-wings
to flop through

GERTIE *begins to giggle at the idea The MOTHER sniffs*
ERNEST (*satirically*) Just as you'd flounder to your Eddie

GERTIE *lifts her hands with a little sharp gesture as if to say,*
"Now the fun's begun"

NELLIE (*turning suddenly, aside with scorn*) Oh, should I? You'd
catch me running after anybody!

MOTHER (*rising*) There, that'll do Why don't you go up town,
if you're going?

NELLIE LAMBERT *haughtily marches off and puts on a dark
coat and a blue hat*

NELLIE Is it raining, Gert?

GERTIE No, it's quite fine

NELLIE I'll bet it's fine!

GERTIE Well, you asked me It *is* fine, it's not raining

The MOTHER *re-enters from the passage, bringing a bonnet
and a black coat*

NELLIE Want me to bring anything, Mater?

MOTHER I shall leave the meat for you

NELLIE Alright Come on, Gert

They go out

MOTHER (*She dreads that her son is angry with her and, affecting
carelessness, puts the question to him, to find out*) Should we
be getting a few Christmas-tree things for little Margaret? I
expect Emma and Joe will be here for Christmas it seems
nothing but right, and it's only six weeks now

ERNEST (*coldly*) Alright

*He gets up and takes another book from the shelf without
looking at her She stands a moment suspended in the act of
putting a pin through her bonnet*

MOTHER Well, I think we ought to make a bit of Christmas for
the little thing, don't you?

ERNEST Ay You gave our things to the lads, didn't you? (*He still
does not look up from his books*)

MOTHER (*with a sound of failure in her voice*) Yes And they've
kept them better than ever I thought they would They've only
broken your blue bird—the one you bought when you were
quite little

There is a noise of footsteps and a knock at the door. The MOTHER answers.

(Trying to be affable, but diffident, her gorge having risen a little.)
Oh, is it you, Maggie? Come in. How ever have you got down, a night like this? Didn't you get over the ankles in mud?

She re-enters, followed by a ruddy girl of twenty, a full-bosomed, heavily-built girl, of medium stature and handsome appearance, ruddy and black. She is wearing a crimson tam-o'-shanter and a long grey coat. She keeps her head lowered, and glancing only once splendidly at ERNEST, replies with a strange, humble defiance:

MAGGIE: No—oh, it's not so bad: besides, I came all round by the road.

MOTHER: I should think you're tired, after school.

MAGGIE: No; it's a relief to walk in the open; and I rather like a black night; you can wrap yourself up in it. Is Nellie out?

MOTHER *(stiffly)*: Yes; she's gone up town.

MAGGIE *(non-significantly)*: Ah, I thought I passed her. I wasn't sure. She wouldn't notice me; it is dark over the fields.

MOTHER: Yes, it is. I'm sure I'm awful at recognizing people.

MAGGIE: Yes—and so am I, generally. But it's no good bothering. If they like to take offence, they have to. . . . I can't help it.

The MOTHER sniffs slightly. She goes into the passage and returns with a string net bag. She is ready to go out

MOTHER *(still distantly)*: Won't you take your things off? *(Looks at the bread once more before going)*

MAGGIE: Ah, thanks, I will.

She takes off her hat and coat and hangs them in the passage. She is wearing a dark blue cloth "pinafore-dress", and beneath the blue straps and shoulder pieces a blouse of fine woollen stuff with a small intricate pattern of brown and red. She is flushed and handsome; her features are large, her eyes dark, and her hair falls in loose profusion of black tendrils about her face. The coil at the back is coming undone; it is short and not heavy. She glances supremely at ERNEST, feeling him watching her.

MOTHER *(at the oven)*: You hear, Ernest? This white cake will be done in about five minutes, and the brown loaves in about twenty.

ERNEST Alright, my dear

This time it is she who will not look at him

MAGGIE (*laughing a low, short laugh*) My hair!—is it a sight? I have to keep my coat collar up, or it would drop right down—what bit of it there is

She stands away from the mirror, pinning it up, but she cannot refrain from just one glance at herself

ERNEST LAMBERT watches her, and then turns to his MOTHER, who is pulling on a pair of shabby black gloves MRS LAMBERT, however, keeps her eyes consciously averted, she is offended, and is a woman of fierce pride

MOTHER Well, I expect I shall see you again, Maggie

MAGGIE (*with a faint, grave triumph*) It depends what time you come back I shan't have to be late

MOTHER Oh, you'll be here when I get back

MAGGIE (*submissive, but with minute irony*) Very well

MOTHER And don't forget that bread, Ernest

She picks her bag off the table and goes out, without having looked at either of them

ERNEST (*affectionately*) No, Little, I won't

There is a pause for a moment MAGGIE PEARSON sits in the arm-chair opposite him, who is on the sofa, and looks straight at him He raises his head after a moment and smiles at her

MAGGIE Did you expect me?

ERNEST (*nodding*) I knew you'd come You know, when you feel as certain as if you couldn't possibly be mistaken But I did swear when I came out of Coll and found it raining

MAGGIE So did I Well, not swear, but I was mad Hasn't it been a horrid week?

ERNEST Hasn't it?—and I've been so sick of things

MAGGIE Of what?

ERNEST Oh, of fooling about at College—and everything

MAGGIE (*grimly*) You'd be sicker of school

ERNEST I don't know At any rate I should be doing something real, whereas, as it is—oh, Coll's all foolery and flummery

MAGGIE I wish I had a chance of going I feel as if they'd been pulling things away from me all week—like a baby that has had everything taken from it

ERNEST (*laughing*) Well, if school pulls all your playthings and

cance it is, when you think of it The profs. would make a great long essay out of the idea. Then the rhythm is finer: it's more complicated.

MAGGIE (*seizing the word to vindicate herself when no vindication is required*): Yes, it is more complicated: it is more complicated in every way. You see, I didn't understand it at first. It is best. Yes, it is. (*She reads it again.*)

He takes the loaf from the oven and puts the fresh one in.

ERNEST: What have you been doing?

MAGGIE (*faltering, smiling*): I? Only—only some French

ERNEST: What, your diary?

MAGGIE (*laughing, confused*): Ah—but I don't think I want you to see it.

ERNEST: Now, you know you wrote it for me! Don't you think it was a good idea, to get you to write your diary in French? You'd never have done any French at all but for that, and you'd certainly never have told me. . . . You never tell me *your* side.

MAGGIE: There's nothing to tell.

ERNEST (*shaking his finger excitedly*): That's just what you say, that's just what you say! As many things happen for you as for me

MAGGIE. Oh, but you go to Derby every day, and you see folks, and I——

ERNEST (*flinging his hand at her*): Piffle! I tell you—do I tell you the train was late? Do I——?

MAGGIE (*interrupting, laughing in confusion and humility*): Yes, you do—ah!

He has stopped suddenly with tremendous seriousness and excitement.

ERNEST: When?

MAGGIE (*nervous, apologizing, laughing*): On Sunday—when you told me you'd have——

ERNEST (*flinging her words aside with excited gesture*): There you are!—you're raking up a trifle to save you from the main issue. Just like a woman! What I said was (*He becomes suddenly slow and fierce.*) you never tell me about you, and you drink me up, get me up like a cup with both hands and drink yourself breathless—and—and there you are—you, you never pour me any wine of yourself——

MAGGIE (*watching him, fascinated and a little bit terror-struck*) But isn't it your fault?

He turns on her with a fierce gesture She starts
ERNEST How can it be, when I'm always asking you——' (*He scratches his head with wild exasperation*)

MAGGIE (*almost inaudibly*) Well——

He blazes at her so fiercely, she does not continue, but drops her head and looks at her knee, biting her finger
ERNEST (*abruptly*) Come on—let's see what hundreds of mistakes

She looks at him, dilates, laughs nervously, and goes to her coat, returning with a school exercise-book, doubled up

He sits on the sofa, brings her beside him with a swift gesture Then he looks up at the fire, and starts away round the table

ERNEST (*going into the scullery and crossing the room with dust-pan*) I must mend the fire There's a book of French verse with my books Be looking at that while I

His voice descends to the cellar, where he is heard hammering the coal He returns directly

She stands at the little cupboard, with her face in a book She is very short-sighted

He mends the fire without speaking to her, and goes out to wash his hands

ERNEST (*returning*) Well, what do you think of it? I got it for fourpence

MAGGIE I like it ever so much

ERNEST You've hardly seen it yet Come on

They sit together on the sofa and read from the exercise-book, she nervously
(*Suddenly*) Now, look here—Oh, the poor verbs! I don't think anybody dare treat them as you do! Look here!

She puts her head closer

He jerks back his head, rubbing his nose frantically, laughing
Your hair did tickle me!

She turns her face to his, laughing, with open mouth He breaks the spell

Well, have you seen it?

MAGGIE (*hesitating, peering across the lines*) No-o-o

ERNEST (*suddenly thrusting his finger before her*) There! I wonder it doesn't peck your nose off You are a——

She has discovered her mistake and draws back with a little vibrating laugh of shame and conviction

You hussy, what should it have been?

MAGGIE (*hesitating*) "Eurent?"

ERNEST (*sitting suddenly erect and startling her up too*) What! The preterite? The preterite? And you're talking about going to school!

She laughs at him with nervous shame, when he glares at her, she dilates with fine terror

(Ominously) Well——?

MAGGIE (*in the depths of laughing despair, very softly and timidly*) I don't know

ERNEST (*relaxing into pathetic patience*) Verbs of motion take être, and if you do a thing frequently, use the imperfect You are—— Well, you're inexpressible!

They turn to the diary she covered with humiliation, he aggrieved They read for a while, he shaking his head when her light springing hair tickles him again

(Softly) What makes you say that?

MAGGIE (*softly*) What?

ERNEST That you are "un enfant de Samedi"—a Saturday child?

MAGGIE (*mistrusting herself so soon*) Why—it's what they say, you know

ERNEST (*gently*) How?

MAGGIE Oh—when a child is serious, when it doesn't play except on Saturdays, when it is quite free

ERNEST And you mean you don't play?

She looks at him seriously

No, you haven't got much play in you, have you?—I fool about so much

MAGGIE (*nodding*) That's it You can forget things and play about I always think of Francis Thompson's *Shelley*, you know—how he made paper boats

ERNEST (*flattered at the comparison*) But I don't make paper boats I tell you, you think too much about me I tell you I have got nothing but a gift of coloured words And do I teach you to

play?—not to hold everything so serious and earnest? (*He is very serious.*)

She nods at him again. He looks back at the paper. It is finished. Then they look at one another, and laugh a little laugh, not of amusement.

ERNEST Ah, your poor diary! (*He speaks very gently.*)

She hides her head and is confused.

I haven't marked the rest of the mistakes. Never mind—we won't bother, shall we? You'd make them again, just the same.

She laughs. They are silent a moment or two, it is very still. You know (*He begins sadly, and she does not answer*)—you think too much of me—you do, you know.

She looks at him with a proud, sceptical smile. (*Suddenly wroth*) You are such a flat, you won't believe me! But I know—if I don't, who does? It's just like a woman, always aching to believe in somebody or other, or something or other. *She smiles.*

I say, what will you have? Baudelaire?

MAGGIE (*not understanding*) What?

ERNEST Baudelaire

MAGGIE (*nervous, faltering*) But who's—?

ERNEST Do you mean to say you don't know who Baudelaire is?

MAGGIE (*defensively*) How should I?

ERNEST Why, I gassed to you for half an hour about him, a month back—and now he might be a Maori——!

MAGGIE It's the names—being foreign.

ERNEST Baudelaire—Baudelaire—it's no different from Pearson!

MAGGIE (*laughing*) It sounds a lot better.

ERNEST (*laughing, also, and opening the book*) Come on! Here, let's have *Maîtresse des Maîtresses*, should we?

MAGGIE (*with gentle persuasiveness*) Yes. You'll read it?

ERNEST You can have a go, if you like.

They both laugh. He begins to read Le Balcon in tolerably bad French, but with some genuine feeling. She watches him all the time. At the end, he turns to her in triumph, and she looks back in ecstasy.

There! isn't that fine?

She nods repeatedly.

That's what they can do in France. It's so heavy and full and

voluptuous like oranges falling and rolling a little way along a dark-blue carpet, like twilight outside when the lamp's lighted, you get a sense of rich, heavy things, as if you smelt them, and felt them about you in the dusk isn't it?

She nods again

Ah, let me read you *The Albatross* This is one of the best—anybody would say so—you see, fine, as good as anything in the world (*Begins to read*)

There is a light, quick step outside, and a light tap at the door, which opens

They frown at each other, and he whispers

ERNEST Damn! (*Aloud*) Hell, Beat!

There enters a girl of twenty-three or four, short, slight, pale, with dark circles under her rather large blue eyes, and with dust-coloured hair. She wears a large brown heaver hat and a long grey-green waterproof-coat

BEATRICE WYLD Hello, Ernest, how are ter? Hello, Mag! Are they all out?

ERNEST (*shutting up the book and drawing away from MAGGIE* *The action is reciprocal—BEATRICE WYLD seats herself in the arm-chair opposite*) They've gone up town I don't suppose Nellie will be long

BEATRICE (*coughing, speaking demurely*) No, she won't see I ddie to-night

ERNEST (*leaning back*) Not till after ten

BEATRICE (*rather loudly, sitting up*) What! Does he come round after they shut up shop?

ERNEST (*smiling ironically*) Ay, if it's getting on for eleven——!

BEATRICE (*turning in her chair*) Good lawk!—are they that bad? Isn't it fair sickenin'?

ERNEST He gets a bit wild sometimes,

BEATRICE I should think so, at that price Shall you ever get like that Mag?

MAGGIE Like what, Beatrice?

BEATRICE Now, Maggie Pearson, don't pretend to be 'oimmin' She knows as well as I do, doesn't she, Ernest?

MAGGIE Indeed I don't (*She is rather high-and-mighty, but not impressive*)

BEATRICE Garn! We know you, don't we, Ernie? She's as bad as

anybody at the bottom, but she pretends to be mighty 'ormin'
MAGGIE I'm sure you're mistaken, Beatrice

BEATRICE Not much of it, old girl We're not often mistaken, are we, Ernie? Get out, we're the "dead certs"—aren't we, Willie?
(*She laughs with mischievous exultance, her tongue between her teeth*)

MAGGIE (*with great but ineffectual irony*) Oh, I'm glad somebody is a "dead cert" I'm very glad indeed! I shall know where to find one now

BEATRICE You will, Maggie

There is a slight, dangerous pause

BEATRICE (*demurely*) I met Nellie and Gertie, coming

ERNEST Ay, you would

MAGGIE (*bitterly*) Oh, yes

BEATRICE (*still innocently*) She had got a lovely rose I won-
dred—

ERNEST Yes, she thought Eddie would be peeping over the mouse-
traps and bird-cages I bet she examines those drowning-mouse
engines every time she goes past

BEATRICE (*with vivacity*) Not likely, not likely! She marches by
as if there was nothing but a blank in the atmosphere You watch
her Eyes *Right!*—but she nudges Gert to make her see if he's
there

ERNEST (*laughing*) And then she turns in great surprise

BEATRICE No, she doesn't She keeps "Eyes Front", and smiles like
a young pup—and the blushes!—Oh, William, too lov'ly f'r any-
fing!

ERNEST I'll bet the dear boy enjoys that blush

BEATRICE Ra-ther! (*Artlessly revenant à son mouton*) And he'll
have the rose and all, to rejoice the cockles of his heart this
time

ERNEST (*trying to ward it off*) Ay I suppose you'll see him with it
on Sunday

BEATRICE (*still innocently*) It was a beauty, William! Did you bring
it for her?

ERNEST I got it in Derby

BEATRICE (*unmasking*) Did you? Who gave it you, Willie?

ERNEST (*evasively, pretending to laugh*) Nay, it wouldn't do to tell

BEATRICE Oh, William, do tell us! Was it the Dark, or the Athletics?

ERNEST What if it was neither?

BEATRICE Oh, Willie, *another*! Oh, it *is* shameful! Think of the poor things, what damage you may do them

ERNEST (*uneasily*) Yes, they are delicate pieces of goods, women Men have to handle them gently, like a man selling millinery

BEATRICE (*hesitating, then refraining from answering this attack fully*) It's the hat-pins, Willie dear But do tell us Was it the Gypsy?—let's see, you generally call it her in German, don't you?—What's the German for gypsy, Maggie?—But was it the Gypsy, or the Athletic Girl that does Botany?

ERNEST (*shaking his head*) No It was an Frewhonian

BEATRICE (*knitting her brows*) Is that the German for another? Don't say so, William! (*Sighs heavily*) "Sigh no more, ladies"—Oh, William! And these two are quite fresh ones, and all Do you like being a mutton-bone, William?—one bitch at one end and one at the other? Do you think he's such a juicy bone to squabble for, Maggie?

MAGGIE (*red and mortified*) I'm sure I don't think anything at all about it, Beatrice

BEATRICE No, we've got more sense, we have, Maggie We know him too well—he's not worth it, is he?

MAGGIE PEARSON *does not reply*

BEATRICE WYLD *looks at her dress, carefully rubbing off some spot or other, then she resumes*

BEATRICE But surely it's not another, Willie?

ERNEST What does it matter who it is? Hang me, I've not spoken to—I've hardly said ten words—you said yourself, I've only just known them

BEATRICE Oh, Willie, I'm sure I thought it was most desperate—from what you told me

There is another deadly silence BEATRICE resumes innocently, quite unperturbed

Has he told you, Maggie?

MAGGIE (*very coldly*) I'm sure I don't know

BEATRICE (*simply*) Oh, he *can't* have done, then You'd never have forgot There's one like a Spaniard—or was it like an Amazon, Willie?

ERNEST Go on Either'll do

BEATRICE A Spanish Amazon, Maggie—olive-coloured, like the

colour of a young clear bit of sea-weed, he said—and, oh, I know! “great free gestures”—a cool clear colour, not red Don't you think she'd be lovely?

MAGGIE I do indeed

BEATRICE Too lovely f'r anyfing?—And the other Oh, yes “You should see her run up the college stairs! She can go three at a time, like a hare running uphill”—And she was top of the Inter list for Maths and Botany Don't you wish you were at college, Maggie?

MAGGIE For some things

BEATRICE I do We don't know what he's up to when he's there, do we?

MAGGIE I don't know that we're so very anxious——

BEATRICE (*convincingly*) We're not, but he thinks we are, and I believe, he makes it all up I bet the girls just think “H'm Here's a ginger-and-white fellow, let's take a bit of the conceit out of him”—and he thinks they're gone on him, doesn't he?

MAGGIE Very likely

BEATRICE He *does*, Maggie, that's what he does And I'll bet, if we could hear him—the things he says about us! I'll bet he says there's a girl with great brown eyes——

ERNEST Shut up, Beat! you little devil—you don't know when to stop

BEATRICE (*affecting great surprise*) William! Maggie! Just fancy! There is another silence, not ominous this time, but charged with suspense

What am I a devil for? (*Half timidly*)

ERNEST (*flushing up at the sound of her ill-assurance*) Look here, you may just as well drop it It's stale, it's flat It makes no mark, don't flatter yourself—we're sick of it, that's all It's a case of *ennui* Vous m'agacez les nerfs Il faut aller au diable (*He rises, half laughing, and goes for the dust-pan*)

BEATRICE (*heir nose a trifle out of joint*) Translate for us, Maggie
MAGGIE shakes her head, without replying She has a slight advantage now

ERNEST crosses the room to go to coal-cellar

BEATRICE coughs slightly, adjusts her tone to a casual, disinterested conversation, and then says, from sheer inability to conquer her spite

MAGGIE Put it on the fire and have done with it

They look at her in some astonishment at the vandalism of the remark

ERNEST But *(He looks at the loaf on all sides)*

MAGGIE It's no good, and it'll only grieve their poor hearts if they see it "What the heart doesn't"

BEATRICE Ay, put it on, William What's it matter? Tell 'em the cat ate it

ERNEST *(hesitating)* Should I?

BEATRICE *(nudging his elbow)* Ay, go on

He puts the loaf on the fire, which is not yet mended, and they stand watching the transparent flames lick it up

ERNEST *(half sad, whimsically, repentant)* The Staff of Life——

MAGGIE It's a faggot now, not a staff

ERNEST Ah, well! *(He slides all the cinders and BEATRICE's scrapings together in the newspaper and pours them in the fire)*

BEATRICE *(holding up her scraped loaf)* It doesn't show, being brown You want to wrap it in a damp cloth now Have you got a cloth?

ERNEST What?—a clean tea-towel?

BEATRICE Ay, that'll do Come here, let's go and wet it

She goes out, and re-enters directly with the towel screwed up She folds it round the loaf, the others watching She sets the shrouded loaf on the table, and they all sit down There is a little pause

Have you given over coming down to chapel now, Maggie?

MAGGIE N-no I don't know that I have Why?

BEATRICE You don't often put in an appearance now

MAGGIE *(a trifle petulantly)* Don't I? Well, I don't feel like it, I suppose

BEATRICE William, you have something to answer for, my boy *(She speaks portentously)*

ERNEST Shall I? Ne'er mind, I'll say "adsum" every time Recording Angel "Ernest Lambert"—"Adsum!"

BEATRICE But you don't know what the little Mas say about you, my lad

ERNEST The dear little Mas! They will be gossiping about——

BEATRICE *(springing from her chair)* Look out! there's Nellie Take that in th' pantry, William Come out!

She thrusts the towelled loaf into ERNEST'S hands, and he hurries away with it, while she hastily shoots the coal on the fire, and, putting down the dust-pan by the boiler, sits in her chair and looks " 'ormin' "

Enter NELLIE LAMBERT and GERTIE COOMBER, blinking

NELLIE (*bending her head to shield her eyes*) Hasn't Ma come?

I never saw her Hullo, Maggie, you've not gone yet, you see (*She sniffs and goes straight to the oven*) Goodness, what a smell of burning! Have you been and forgotten the bread? (*She kneels and looks in the oven*)

BEATRICE (*very quietly and negligently*) Ernest forgot that one It's only a bit caught

NELLIE *peeps in the panchion where the other loaves are—*
✓ *those baked by the mother*

NELLIE He generally forgets if Maggie's here

BEATRICE *bursts out laughing*

MAGGIE (*rising, indignant*) Why, Nellie, when has it ever been burnt before?

NELLIE (*smiling a careless smile*) Many a time

MAGGIE Not when I've been here

NELLIE Aren't you going to sit down a bit, Gert?

GERTIE No, I'm off Our Frances'll be wanting her ducks (*She laughs, but does not go*)

MAGGIE, *her head hanging, goes to put on her hat and coat*

The other girls smile, meaningly, at one another

Are you going, then, Maggie?

MAGGIE (*distantly*) Yes, it's getting late I've a long walk, you see

GERTIE You have! I'm glad I've not got it I often wonder how you dare go through those woods on a pitch-dark night

BEATRICE I daresn't (*She laughs at herself*)

MAGGIE I'd rather go through our wood than through Nottingham Road, with the people——!

BEATRICE I'm glad you would, for I wouldn't

ERNEST LAMBERT *pulls on his overcoat and his cap He gathers certain books He looks at MAGGIE, and she at him*

MAGGIE Well, good night, everybody I shall have to go (*She hesitates, finding it difficult to break away*)

BEATRICE AND NELLIE Good night

GERTIE Good night, Maggie I hope it won't be too muddy for you

MAGGIE *laughs slightly*

NELLIE (*as the two go through the door, loudly*) And don't be ever so late back, our Ernċst!

They do not reply As their steps are heard passing the wide window, BEATRICE flings up her arms and her feet in an ungraceful, exultant glee, flicking her fingers with noiseless venom

BEATRICE (*in an undertone*) I gave her beans!

NELLIE (*turning, with a smile, and lighting up*) Did you? What did you say?

GERTIE (*amused, giggling, but shamefaced*) Did you?

BEATRICE (*exultant*) Oh, lum! I'll bet her cheeks are warm!

END OF ACT II

ACT III

The same room, half an hour later

BEATRICE WYLD sits in the arm-chair, and NELLIE LAMBERT on the sofa, the latter doing drawn-thread work on a white tray-cloth, part of which is fixed in a ring at this part NELLIE is stitching

BEATRICE Ah, it makes you grin! the way she used to talk before she had him!

NELLIE She did She thought nobody was as good as her Arthur She's found her mistake out

BEATRICE She has an' all! He wanted some chips for his supper the other night, when I was there "Well," I said, "it's not far to Fretwell's, Arthur" He did look mad at me "I'm not going to fetch chips," he said, a cocky little fool, and he crossed his little legs till I should 'a liked to have smacked his mouth I said to her, "Well, Mabel, if you do, you're a fool!"—in her state, and all the men that were about! He's not a bit of consideration You never saw anybody as fagged as she looks

NELLIE She does I felt fair sorry for her when I saw her last Sunday but one She doesn't look like she used

BEATRICE By Jove, she doesn't! He's brought her down a good many pegs I shouldn't wonder if she wasn't quite safe, either She told me she had awful shooting pains up her side, and they last for five minutes

NELLIE (*looking up*) Oh?

BEATRICE Ay! I'm glad I'm not in her shoes They may talk about getting married as they like! Not this child!

NELLIE Not to a thing like him

BEATRICE I asked her if she didn't feel frightened, an' she said she didn't care a scrap I should care, though—and I'll bet she does, at the bottom

The latch clicks The MOTHER enters, carrying a large net full of purchases, and a brown-paper parcel She lets these fall heavily on the table, and sits on the nearest chair, panting a little, with evident labour of the heart

MOTHER: Yes, my lady!—you called for that meat, didn't you?

NELLIE (*rising and going to look in the parcels*): Well, my duck, I looked for you downtown; then when I was coming back, I forgot all about it.

MOTHER: And I—was silly enough—to lug it myself—

NELLIE (*crossing to her mother, all repentant*): Well, what did you for?—you knew I could fetch it again! You do do such ridiculous things! (*She begins to take off her mother's bonnet*)

MOTHER: Yes! We know your fetching it—again. If I hadn't met little Abel Gibson—I really don't think I should have got home.

BEATRICE (*leaning forward*): If Nellie forgets it, you should forget it, Mrs Lambert. I'm sure you ought not to go lugging all those things.

MOTHER: But I met young Abel Gibson just when I was thinking I should have to drop them—and I said: "Here, Abel, my lad, are you going home?" and he said he was, so I told him he could carry my bag. He's a nice little lad. He says his father hasn't got much work, poor fellow. I believe that woman's a bad manager. She'd let that child clean up when he got home—and he said his Dad always made the beds. She's not a nice woman, I'm sure. (*She shakes her head and begins to unfasten her coat.*)

NELLIE, *seeing her mother launched into easy gossip, is at ease on her score, and returns to the bags.*

You needn't go looking; there's nothing for you.

NELLIE (*petulantly*): You always used to bring us something—

MOTHER: Ay, I've no doubt I did. . . . (*She sniffs and looks at BEATRICE WYLD.*)

NELLIE (*still looking, unconvinced*): Hello! Have a grape, Beatrice. (*She offers BEATRICE a white-paper bag of very small black grapes.*)

MOTHER: They want washing first, to get the sawdust out. Our Ernest likes those little grapes, and they are cheap: only fourpence.

BEATRICE (*looking up from the bag*): Oh, they are cheap. No, I won't have any, Nellie, thanks.

NELLIE: I'll wash them.

MOTHER: Just let the tap run on them—and get a plate.

NELLIE: Well, as if I shouldn't get a plate! The little Ma thinks we're all daft.

MOIHER (*sniffing—it is her manner of winking*) Is all the bread done?

NELLIE Yes I took the last out about a quarter of an hour ago

MOTHER (to BEATRICE) Was Maggie Pearson gone when you came?

BEATRICE No—she's only been gone about three-quarters of an hour

MOTHER (*tossing her head and lowering her tone confidentially*)

Well, really! I stopped looking at a man selling curtains a bit longer than I should, thinking she'd be gone

BEATRICE Pah!—it makes you sick, doesn't it?

MOTHER It does You wouldn't think she'd want to come trailing down here in weather like this, would you?

BEATRICE You wouldn't I'll bet you'd not catch me!—and she knows what you think, alright

MOTHER Of course she does

BEATRICE She wouldn't care if the old Dad was here, scowling at her, she'd come

MOTHER If that lad was at home

BEATRICE (*scornfully*) Ay!

The MOTHER rises and goes out with her coat

NELLIE enters, with a plate of wet black grapes

NELLIE Now, Beat! (*Offering the grapes*)

BEATRICE No, Nellie, I don't think I'll have any

NELLIE Go on—have some! Have some—go on! (*Speaks rather imperatively*)

BEATRICE takes a few grapes in her hand

What a scroddy few! Here, have some more

BEATRICE (*quietly*) No, Nellie, thanks, I won't have any more I don't think they'd suit me

NELLIE sits down and begins to eat the grapes, putting the skins on a piece of paper

The MOTHER re-enters She looks very tired She begins carrying away the little parcels

NELLIE Don't you put those away, Mother, I'll do it in a minute

The MOTHER continues NELLIE rises in a moment or two, frowning

You are a persistent little woman! Why don't you wait a bit and let me do it?

MOTHER Because your father will be in in a minute, and I don't want him peeking and prying into everything, thinking I'm a millionaire (*She comes and sits down in her rocking-chair by the oven*)

NELLIE *continues to carry away the goods, which have littered the table, looking into every parcel*

NELLIE Hello! what are these little things?

MOTHER Never you mind

NELLIE Now, little woman, don't you try to hug yourself and be secretive. What are they?

MOTHER They're pine-kernels (*turning to BLAIRICK*) Our Linest's always talking about the nut-cakes he gets at Mrs Dacre's. I thought I'd see what they were like. Put them away, don't let him see them. I shan't let him know at all, if they're not up to much. I'm not going to have him saying Mother Dacre's things are better than mine.

BEATRICE I wouldn't—for I'm sure they're not.

MOTHER Still, I rather like the idea of nuts. Here, give me one. I'll try it.

They each eat a pine-kernel with the air of a connoisseur in flavours

(*smiling to herself*) Um—aren't they oily?

BLAIRICK They are! But I rather like them.

NELLIE So do I (*takes another*)

MOTHER (*gratified*) Here, put them away, miss!

NELLIE *takes another. The MOTHER rises and snatches them away from her, really very pleased*

There won't be one left, I know, if I leave them with her (*She puts them away*)

NELLIE (*smiling and nodding her head after her mother, in a whisper*) Isn't she fussy?

BEATRICE *puts out her tongue and laughs*

MOTHER (*returning*) I tried a gelatine sponge last week. He likes it much better than cornflour. Mrs Dacre puts them in mince-meat, instead of suet—the pine-kernels. I must try a bit.

BEATRICE Oh! it sounds better.

MOTHER (*seating herself*) It does (*She looks down at the bread*)

BEATRICE *puts up her shoulders in suspense*

I think you let this one dry up

NELLIE: No, I didn't. It was our Ernest who let it burn.

MOTHER: Trust him! And what's he done? (*She begins to look round.*)

BEATRICE *pulls a very wry face, straightens it quickly and says calmly:*

EATRICE: Is your clock right, Mrs Lambert?

MOTHER (*looking round at the clock*): Ten minute²—ten minutes fast. Why, what time is it?

BEATRICE: Good lack! (*Rising suddenly.*) It's half-past ten! Won't our Pa rave! "Yes, my gel—it's turning-out time again. We're going to have a stop put to it." And our mother will recite! Oh, the recitations!—there's no shutting her up when she begins. But at any rate, she shuts our Pa up, and he's a nuisance when he thinks he's got just cause to be wrath.—Where did I put my things?

MOTHER: I should think that Nellie's put hers on top. (*She looks at NELLIE.*) Don't sit there eating every one of those grapes. You know our Ernest likes them.

NELLIE (*suddenly incensed*): Good gracious! I don't believe I've had more than half a dozen of the things!

MOTHER (*laughing and scornful*): Half a dozen!

NELLIE: Yes, half a dozen.—Beatrice, we can't have a thing in this house—everything's for our Ernest.

MOTHER: What a story! What a story! But he *does* like those little grapes.

NELLIE: And everything else.

MOTHER (*quietly, with emphasis*): He gets a good deal less than you.

NELLIE (*withdrawing from dangerous ground*): I'll bet.

GERTIE COOMBER *runs in.*

BEATRICE: Hello, Gert, haven't you seen John?

GERTIE (*putting up her chin*) No.

BEATRICE: A little nuisance!—fancy!

GERTIE: Eh, I don't care—not me.

NELLIE: No, it's her fault. She never does want to see him. I wonder any fellow comes to her.

GERTIE (*nonchalantly*): Um—so do

BEATRICE: Get out, Gert; you know you're fretting your heart out 'cause he's not come.

She goes out slowly and unwillingly, her lips closed angrily.

The MOTHER smiles, sighs, and looks sad and tired again.

MOTHER (to herself): It's a very funny thing!

She wanders round the room, looking for the bread. She light a taper and goes into the scullery.

(re-passing, she repeats): A very remarkable thing!

She goes into the pantry on right, and after a moment returns with the loaf in the damp cloth, which she has unfolded. She stands looking at the loaf, repeating a sharp little sound against her palate with her tongue, quickly vibrating her head up and down.

(to herself): So this is it, is it? It's a nice thing!—And they put it down there, thinking I shouldn't see it. It's a nice thing! (Goes and looks in the oven, then says bitterly): I always said she was a deep one. And he thinks he'll stop out till his father comes!—And what have they done with the other?—Burnt it, I should think. That's what they've done. It's a nice thing—a nice thing! (She sits down in the rocking-chair, perfectly rigid, still overdone with weariness and anger and pain.)

After a moment, the garden gate is heard to bang back, and a heavy step comes up the path, halting, punctuated with the scratch and thrust of a walking-stick, rather jarring on the bricked yard.

The FATHER enters. He also bends his head a little from the light, peering under his hat-brim.

The MOTHER has quickly taken the withered loaf and dropped it in among the others in the panchion.

The FATHER does not speak, but goes straight to the passage, and hangs up his hat, overcoat, and jacket, then returns and stands very near the fire, holding his hands close down to the open ruddy grate. He sways slightly when he turns, after a moment or two, and stands with his hands spread behind his back, very near the fire.

The MOTHER turns away her head from him.

He remains thus for a minute or so, then he takes a step forward, and, leaning heavily on the table, begins to pick the grapes from the plate, spitting out the skins into his right hand and flinging them at random towards the fire behind his back, leaning all the time heavily with the left hand on the table.

After a while this irritates the MOTHER exceedingly
MOTHER You needn't eat all those grapes There's somebody else!
FATHER (*speaking with an exaggerated imitation of his son's English*) "Somebody else!" Yes, there is "somebody else!" (*He pushes the plate away and the grapes roll on the table*) I know they was not bought for me! I know it! I know it! (*His voice is rising*) Somebody else! Yes, there is somebody else! I'm not daft! I'm not a fool

Nothing's got for me No-o You can get things for them, you can,
The MOTHER turns away her head, with a gesture of contempt

(*Continues with maddening tipsy, ironic snarl*) I'm not a fool!
I can see it! I can see it! I'm not daft! There's nothing for me but you begrudge me every bit I put in my mouth
MOTHER (*with cold contempt*) You put enough down your own throat There's no need for anybody else You take good care you have your share

FATHER I have my share Yes, I do, I do!

MOTHER (*contemptuously*) Yes, you do

FATHER Yes, I do But I shouldn't if you could help it, you begrudging bitch What did you put away when I came in, so that I shouldn't see it? Something! Yes! Something you'd got for them! Nobody else Yes! I know you'd got it for somebody else!

MOTHER (*quietly, with bitter scorn*) As it happens, it was nothing

FATHER (*his accent is becoming still more urban His O's are A's, so that "nothing" is "nathing"*) Nathing! Nathing! You're a liar, you're a liar I heard the scuffle You don't think I'm a fool, do you, woman?

She curls her lips in a deadly smile

FATHER I know, I know! Do you have what you give me for dinner? No, you don't You take good care of it!

MOTHER Look here, you get your good share Don't think you keep the house Do you think I manage on the few lousy shillings you give me? No, you get as much as you deserve, if any man did And if you had a rice pudding, it was because we had none Don't come here talking You look after yourself there's no mistake

FATHER An' I mean to, an' I mean to!

MOTHER Very well, then!

FATHER (*suddenly flaring*): But I'm not going to be treated like a dog in my own house! I'm *not*, so don't think it! I'm master in this house, an' I'm *going* to be. I tell you, I'm master of this house.

MOTHER: You're the only one who thinks so.

FATHER: I'll stop it! I'll put a stop to it. They can go—they can go!

MOTHER: You'd be on short commons if they did.

FATHER: What? What? Me! You saucy bitch, I can keep myself, an' you as well, an' him an' all as holds his head above me—am doing—an' I'll stop it, I'll stop it—or they can go.

MOTHER: Don't make any mistake—you don't keep us. You hardly keep yourself.

FATHER: Do I?—do I? And who does keep 'em, then?

MOTHER: I do—and the girl.

FATHER: You do, do you, you snappy little bitch! You do, do you? Well, keep 'em yourself, then. Keep that lad in his idleness yourself, then.

MOTHER: Very willingly, very willingly. And that lad works ten times as hard as you do.

FATHER: Does he? I should like to see him go down th' pit every day! I should like to see him working every day in th' hole. No, he won't dirty his fingers.

MOTHER: Yes, you wanted to drag all the lads into the pit, and you only begrudge them because I wouldn't let them.

FATHER (*shouting*): You're a liar—you're a liar! I never wanted 'em in th' pit.

MOTHER (*interrupting*): You did your best to get the other two there, anyway.

FATHER (*still shouting*): You're a liar—I never did anything of the sort. What other man would keep his sons doing nothing till they're twenty-two? Where would you find another? Not that I begrudge it him—I don't, bless him. . . .

MOTHER: Sounds like it.

FATHER: I don't. I begrudge 'em nothing. I'm willing to do everything I can for 'em, and 'ow do they treat me? Like a dog, I say, like a dog!

MOTHER: And whose fault is it?

FATHER: Yours, you stinking hussy! It's you as makes 'em like it.

I hey're like you You teach 'em to hate me You make me 'like
dirt for 'em you set 'em against me

MOTHER You set them yourself

FATHER (*shouting*) You're a liar! (*He jumps from his chair and
stands bending towards her, his fist clenched and ready and
threatening*) It's you It always 'as' been you You've done it——

Lute ERNEST LAMBERT

ERNEST (*pulling off his cap and flashing with anger*) It's a fine row
you're kicking up I should bring the neighbours in!

FATHER I don't care a damn what I do, you sneering devil, you!
(*He turns to his son, but remains in the same crouching, threaten-
ing attitude*)

ERNEST (*flaring*) You needn't swear at me, either

FATHER I shall swear at who the devil I like Who are you, you
young hound—who are you, you measley little——

ERNEST At any rate, I'm not a foul-mouthed drunken fool

FATHER (*springing towards him*) What! I'll smite you to the
ground if you say it again, I will, I will!

ERNEST Pah!

*He turns his face aside in contempt from the fist brandished
near his mouth*

FATHER (*shouting*) What! Say it! I'll drive my fist through you!

ERNEST (*suddenly tightening with rage as the fist is pushed near
his face*) Get away, you spitting old fool!

*The FATHER jerks nearer and trembles his fist so near the
other's nose that he draws his head back, quivering with
intense passion and loathing, and lifts his hands*

MOTHER Ernest, Ernest, don't!

There is a slight relaxation

(*Lamentable, pleading*) Don't say any more, Ernest! Let him
say what he likes What should I do if

There is a pause

ERNEST continues rigidly to glare into space beyond his
father

*The FATHER turns to the MOTHER with a snarling movement,
which is nevertheless a movement of defeat He withdraws,
sits down in the arm-chair, and begins, fumbling, to get off his
collar and tie, and afterwards his boots*

ERNEST has taken a book, and stands quite motionless, look-

ing at it. There is heard only the slash of the FATHER'S boot-laces. Then he drags off the boot, and it falls with a loud noise.

ERNEST, very tense, puts down the book, takes off his overcoat, hangs it up, and returns to the side of the sofa nearest the door, where he sits, pretending to read.

There is silence for some moments, and again the whip of boot-laces! Suddenly a snarl breaks the silence.

FATHER: But don't think I'm going to be put down in my own house! It would take a better man than you, you white-faced jockey—or your mother either—or all the lot of you put together! (He waits awhile.) I'm not daft—I can see what she's driving at. (Silence.) I'm not a fool, if you think so. I can pay you yet, you sliving bitch! (He sticks out his chin at his wife.)

ERNEST lifts his head and looks at him.

(Turns with renewing ferocity on his son): Yes, and you either I'll stand no more of your chelp. I'll stand no more! Do you hear me?

MOTHER: Ernest!

ERNEST looks down at his book.

The FATHER turns to the MOTHER.

FATHER: Ernest! Ay, prompt him! Set him on—you know how to do it—you know how to do it!

There is a persistent silence.

I know it! I know it! I'm not daft, I'm not a fool! (The other boot falls to the floor.)

He rises, pulling himself up with the arms of the chair, and, turning round, takes a Waterbury watch with a brass chain from the wall beside the bookcase: his pit watch that the MOTHER hung there when she put his pit-trousers in the cupboard—and winds it up, swaying on his feet as he does so. Then he puts it back on the nail, and a key swings at the end of the chain. Then he takes a silver watch from his pocket, and, fumbling, missing the keyhole, winds that up also with a key, and, swaying forward, hangs it up over the cupboard. Then he lurches round, and, limping pitifully, goes off upstairs.

There is a heavy silence. The Waterbury watch can be heard ticking.

ERNEST: I would kill him, if it weren't that I shiver at the thought of touching him.

MOTHER Oh, you mustn't! Think how awful it would be if there were anything like that I couldn't bear it

ERNEST He is ~~a~~ damned, accursed fool!

The MOTHER sighs ERNEST begins to read

There is a quick patter of feet, and GERTIE COOMPER comes running in

GERTIE Has Mr Lambert come?

MOTHER Ay—in bed

GERTIE My father hasn't come yet Isn't it sickening?

MOTHER It is, child They want horsewhipping, and those that serve them, more

GERTIE I'm sure we haven't a bit of peace of our lives I'm sure when Mother was alive, she used to say her life was a burden, for she never knew when he'd come home, or how

MOTHER And it is so

GERTIE Did you go far, Ernest?

ERNEST (*not looking up*) I don't know Middling

MOTHER He must have gone about home, for he's not been back many minutes

GERTIE There's our Frances shouting!

She runs off

MOTHER (*quietly*) What did you do with that other loaf? burned

ERNEST (*looking up, smiling*) Why, we forgot it, and it got all burned

MOTHER (*rather bitterly*) Of course you forgot it And where is it?

ERNEST Well, it was no good keeping it I thought it would only grieve your heart, the sight of it, so I put it on the fire

MOTHER Yes, I'm sure! That was a nice thing to do, I must say! Put a brown loaf on the fire, and dry the only other one up to a cinder!

The smile dies from his face, and he begins to frown

(*She speaks bitterly*) It's always alike, though If Maggie Pearson's here, nobody else matters It's only a laughing matter if the bread gets burnt to cinders and put on the fire (*Suddenly bursts into a glow of bitterness*) It's all very well, my son—you may talk about caring for me, but when it comes to Maggie Pearson it's very little you care for me—or Nellie—or anybody else

ERNEST (*dashing his fingers through his hair*): You talk just like a woman! As if it makes any difference! As if it makes the least difference!

MOTHER (*folding her hands in her lap and turning her face from him*): Yes, it does.

ERNEST (*frowning fiercely*): It doesn't. Why should it? If I like apples, does it mean I don't like—bread? You know, ~~Ma~~, it doesn't make any difference.

MOTHER (*doggedly*): I know it does.

ERNEST (*shaking his finger at her*): But why should it, why should it? You know you wouldn't be interested in the things we talk about: you know you wouldn't.

MOTHER: Why shouldn't I?

ERNEST: Should you, now? Look here: we talked about French poetry. Should you care about that?

No answer.

You know you wouldn't! And then we talked about those pictures at the Exhibition—about Frank Brangwyn—about Impressionism—for ever such a long time You would only be bored by that—

MOTHER: Why should I? You never tried.

ERNEST: But you wouldn't. You wouldn't care whether it's Impressionism or pre-Raphaelism. (*Pathetically.*)

MOTHER: I don't see why I shouldn't.

ERNEST (*ruffling his hair in despair; after a pause*): And, besides, there are lots of things you can't talk to your own folks about, that you would tell a stranger.

MOTHER (*bitterly*): Yes, I know there are.

ERNEST (*wildly*): Well, I can't help it—can I, now?

MOTHER (*reluctantly*): No—I suppose not—if you say so.

ERNEST: But you know——!

MOTHER (*turning aside again; with some bitterness and passion*): I do know, my boy—I do know!

ERNEST: But I can't help it.

His MOTHER does not reply, but sits with her face averted.

Can I, now? Can I?

MOTHER: You say not.

ERNEST (*changing the position again*): And you wouldn't care if it was Alice, or Lois, or Louie. You never row me if I'm a bit late

when I've been with them It's just Maggie, because you don't like her

MOTHER (*with emphasis*) No, I *don't* like her—and I *can't* say I do

ERNEST But why not? Why not? She's as good as I am—and I'm sure you've nothing against her—have you, now?

MOTHER (*shortly*) No, I don't know I've anything against her

ERNEST Well, then, what do you get so wild about?

MOTHER Because I don't like her, and I never shall, so there, my boy!

ERNEST Because you've made up your mind not to

MOTHER Very well, then

ERNEST (*bitterly*) And you did from the beginning, just because she happened to care for me

MOTHER (*with coldness*) And does nobody else care for you, then, but her?

ERNEST (*knitting his brows and shaking his hands in despair*) Oh, but it's not a question of that

MOTHER (*calmly, coldly*) But it is a question of that

ERNEST (*fiercely*) It isn't! You know it isn't! I care just as much for you as ever—you know I do

MOTHER It looks like it, when night after night you leave me sitting up here till nearly eleven—and gone eleven sometimes—

ERNEST Once, Mother, once—and that was when it was her birthday

MOTHER (*turning to him with the anger of love*) And how many times is it a quarter to eleven, and twenty to?

ERNEST But you'd sit up just the same if I were in, you'd sit up reading—you know you would

MOTHER You don't come in to see

ERNEST When I am in, do you go to bed before then?

MOTHER I do

ERNEST Did you on Wednesday night, or on Tuesday, or on Monday?

MOTHER No, because you were working

ERNEST I was in

MOTHER I'm not going to go to bed and leave you sitting up, and I'm not going to go to bed to leave you to come in when you like so there!

I could hear my father carrying on again. Was he a nuisance?

MOTHER: Is he ever anything else when he's like that?

NELLIE: He is a nuisance. I wish he was far enough! Eddie could hear every word he said.

ERNEST: Shame! Shame!

NELLIE (*in great disgust*): It is! He never hears anything like that.

Oh, I was wild I could have killed him!

MOTHER: You should have sent him home; then he'd not have heard it at all.

NELLIE: He'd only just come, so I'm sure I wasn't going to send him home then.

ERNEST: So you heard it all, to the mild-and-bitter end?

NELLIE: No, I didn't. And I felt such a fool!

ERNEST: You should choose your spot out of earshot, not just by the garden gate. What did you do?

NELLIE: I said, "Come on, Eddie, let's get away from this lot." I'm sure I shouldn't have wondered if he'd gone home and never come near again.

MOTHER (*satirically*): What for?

NELLIE: Why—when he heard that row.

MOTHER: I'm sure it was very bad for him, poor boy.

NELLIE (*fiercely*): How should you like it?

MOTHER: I shouldn't have a fellow there at that time at all.

ERNEST: You thought a father-in-law that kicked up a shindy was enough to scare him off, did you? Well, if you choose your girl, you can't choose your father-in-law—you'll have to tell him that.

NELLIE *has taken off her shoes. She stands in front of the mirror and uncoils her hair, and plaits it in a thick plait which hangs down her back.*

MOTHER: Come, Ernest; you'll never want to get up in the morning.

NELLIE (*suddenly*): Oh! There now! I never gave him that rose.

(*She looks down at her bosom and lifts the head of a rather crushed rose.*) What a nuisance!

ERNEST: The sad history of a rose between two hearts:

"Rose, red rose, that burns with a low flame,
What has broken you?
Hearts, two hearts caught up in a game
Of shuttlecock—Amen!"

NELLIE (*blushing*) Go on, you soft creature! (*Looks at the rose*)

ERNEST Weep over it

NELLIE Shan't!

ERNEST And pickle it, like German girls do

NELLIE Don't be such a donkey

ERNEST Interesting item final fate of the rose

NELLIE goes out, returns in a moment with the rose in an egg-cup in one hand, and a candle in the other

The MOTHER rises

ERNEST I'll rake, Mother

NELLIE lights her candle, takes her shawl off the table, kisses her mother good night, and bids her brother good night as he goes out to the cellar

The MOTHER goes about taking off the heavy green table-cloth, disclosing the mahogany, and laying a doubled table-cloth half across. She sets the table with a cup and saucer, plate, knife, sugar-basin, brown-and-white teapot and tea-caddy. Then she fetches a tin bottle and a soiled snapbag, and lays them together on the bare half of the table. She puts out the salt and goes and drags the pit-trousers from the cupboard and puts them near the fire.

Meanwhile ERNEST has come from the cellar with a large lump of coal, which he pushes down in the fireplace so that it shall not lodge and go out.

MOTHER You'll want some small bits—And bring a few pieces for him in the morning.

ERNEST (*returning to the cellar with the dust-pan*) Alright! I'll turn the gas off now.

The MOTHER fetches another candle and continues her little tasks. The gas goes suddenly down and dies slowly out.

ERNEST comes up with his candlestick on a shovelful of coal. He puts the candle on the table, and puts some coal on the fire, round the "raker." The rest he puts in the shovel on the hearth. Then he goes to wash his hands.

The MOTHER, leaving her candle in the scullery, comes in with an old iron fire-screen which she hangs on the bars of the grate, and the ruddy light shows over and through the worn iron top.

ERNEST is heard jerking the roller-towel. He enters, and goes

to his mother, kissing her forehead, and then her cheek, stroking her cheek with his finger-tips.

ERNEST: Good night, my dear.

MOTHER: Good night.—Don't you want a candle?

ERNEST: No—blow it out. Good night.

MOTHER (very softly): Good night.

There is in their tones a dangerous gentleness—so much gentleness that the safe reserve of their souls is broken.

ERNEST goes upstairs. His bedroom door is heard to shut.

The MOTHER stands and looks in the fire. The room is lighted by the red glow only. Then in a moment or two she goes into the scullery, and after a minute—during which running of water is heard—she returns with her candle, looking little and bowed and pathetic, and crosses the room, softly closing the passage door behind her.

END OF ACT III

Altitude a fragment

(1924)

CHARACTERS

MARY

SPUD

CLARENCE

MILKMAN

IDA

MRS SPRAGUE

MABEL

INDIAN

TONY

ELIZABETH

SCENE I *Kitchen of Mabel's house at Taos*

SCENE II *Another room in the house*

SCENE I

The curtain rises, revealing the kitchen of MABEL'S house at Aaos
MARY *stands in the sunny doorway, chanting to herself, saying*
Om'' resoundingly

MARY This country is waiting It lies spell-bound, waiting The
great South-West, America of America It is waiting What
for? What for?

Enter SPUD, taking in the situation at a glance

SPUD Hello! Hasn't the cook come?

MARY Good morning! No sign of her as yet Isn't morning
wonderful, here at this altitude, in the great South-West? Does
it kindle no heroic response in you, young Intellectual?

SPUD I don't know Maybe I'd better kindle a fire in the stove

MARY Quite right! Homage to the god of fire Wait! An apron!
Let me do it The fire in this house is the woman's fire The fire
in the camp is the man's fire You know the Indians say that?

SPUD No, I didn't know it till you told me

MARY Oh, young Intellectual! It is a Woman Mediator you are
pinning for The Woman Redeemer!

SPUD Maybe! Does this look like an apron?

MARY *(girding on the apron, and busy at the stove)* To do, to
know, and to be! Hamlet had hold of only one-third of the
twisted string

Enter CLARENCE in rose-coloured trousers and much jewellery

CLARENCE Oh, good morning, Mary! Good morning, Spud —Why,
Mary, won't you let Emilia do that?

MARY Do you see any Emilia in the neighbourhood?

CLARENCE Why, no, I don't Is it possible she's not coming? Oh,
what a calamity!

MARY A contretemps, not a calamity, young Idealist The heroic
nature is ready for every emergency Woman is the great go-
between When the cook does not turn up, I am the cook Mary
and Martha should be one person

SPUD What about Magdalene?

INDIAN: No.

MARY: Will one of our young Intellectuals go to the well for water?

MABEL (to Indian): Fetch a pail of water, Joe.

JOE goes out with pail.

MARY: Don't you notice, the moment an Indian comes into the landscape, how all you white people seem so *meaningless*, so ephemeral?

IDA: Why, yes! I was just thinking how ephemeral you all looked when Joe picked up the pail.

MABEL (snorts): It is extraordinary! It's because the Indians have *life*. They have *life*, where we have *nerves*. Haven't you noticed, Mary, at an Indian dance, when the Indians all sit *hacked* up on one side, and the white people on the other, how *all* the life is on the Indian side, and the white people seem so dead? The Indians are like glowing coals, and the white people are like ashes.

IDA: Well, Mabel, and which side are you on?

MABEL (snorts again): The Indian!

MARY: There is something which *combines* the red and the white, the Indian and the American, and is greater than either

MABEL (rushing at SPUD): That's enough bacon, Spud.

SPUD (rising): I don't know that I feel so *ashy* at an Indian dance.

IDA: No, neither do I, Spud.

SPUD examines his finger, critically.

CLARENCE: And I *certainly* don't get any glow from the Indians.

MABEL: Well, you all know what I mean. And you do *all feel* it. Anyway, you *look* it.

IDA: Perhaps we're the ashes of your stormy past, Mabel, and you see in the Indians the red glow of your future.—But, my dear, it's all red paint.

CLARENCE: Exactly: the paint they've daubed on their faces.

SPUD: The danger signal.

MRS SPRAGUE: Have you cut your finger?

SPUD: A little.

IDA: Suck it, Spud

SPUD: I *am* sucking it.

JOE re-enters with the pail.

INDIAN: Here's the water.

MABEL: Alright, Joe. You can go and chop some wood if you like.

JOE grunts, doesn't like, but goes out. MABEL rushes at the stove.

MABEL: I'll fry the bacon, Mary

MARY: Mabel, I am officiating at this altar.

MABEL: But I want my bacon dry, dry! You others can have it as you want it, but I want mine dry.

MARY: You shall have it as dry as the Arizona desert, Mabel.

IDA: Oh, what about Professor Mack? Is he still desiccating in the Arizona desert, studying the habits and misbehaviours of the Cactus?

MABEL: He's coming here.

IDA: Why, how thrilling! Don't you feel awfully bucked, Mary?

MARY: Professor Mack and I have had a perfect correspondence all our lives. This is the first time we shall have slept under the same roof.

IDA: How extraordinary! I wonder what the roof will feel about it.

MABEL: Let's sit down now.

They all sit at table.

Well . . . (*ominously*) here we all are.

SPUD: Minus a few of us.

MABEL: How are you, Alice? You've not said anything yet.

MRS SPRAGUE: Why, I'm fine, Mabel. How are you?

MABEL: Fine! (*snorts*) How is everybody? How are you, Spud? Ida?

SPUD: Fine!

IDA: Fine!

MABEL: Mary, how d'you feel this morning?

MARY: Why, fine!

CLARENCE: If you were going to ask me how I feel, Mabel, I feel fine, perfectly fine. It's wonderful to be here.

MABEL: Ye-es! You're looking marvellous. But you're not going down to the Plaza in those trousers?

CLARENCE: Why, yes. I wasn't going to take them off to go down town.

MABEL: What's the idea?

CLARENCE: As you said, we all *feel* so fine, I thought I'd try to look as fine as I felt.

MABEL: But why in trousers? Why look it in trousers?

CLARENCE: But why not? You wouldn't have me try to look it

without trousers. No, Mabel! If we *feel* wonderful, and we are perhaps rather wonderful, I think it's up to us to come out in our own feathers.

MABEL: Yes, but why feather your legs?

CLARENCE: But why not?

MABEL: It's an exhibitionist complex.

IDA: Mabel, I don't think you can quite say that. I *admire* rose-coloured trousers.

MABEL: Yes, alright, indoors. But not to go down to the Plaza. They're all wrong in the Plaza. Think how the people will *jeer*—and then talk. Another sign of *vice* from over here.

CLARENCE: But what does it matter whether they *jeer* and talk— I shall go perfectly unconscious of them, in my rose-coloured trousers.

MABEL: You won't! You can't! You'll be conscious all the time. You'll be conscious all the time that they're jeering at you, and then you'll get all tied up over it afterwards.

CLARENCE: I assure you, Mabel, I *should* have gone to the Plaza in my rose-coloured trousers *perfectly* unconscious of everybody, if you hadn't started this difficulty.

MABEL: I bet you wouldn't. You *couldn't*. Anyhow, what do you want to go to the Plaza for in rose-coloured trousers? *What* are you conscious of, when you wear them?

CLARENCE (*with hauteur*): Of *feeling* wonderful, and, I hope, of looking it.

MABEL: Clarence! You know everybody will just say you look a fool. Not wonderful at all.

CLARENCE: I thought it didn't matter what the crowd in the Plaza says. Anyhow, you've squashed my efforts. I shall go and take off my trousers and never put them on again.

IDA: But you'll put on others, won't you?

CLARENCE: Yes, *grey* ones.

IDA: But Clarence! Wait. Why don't you walk up and down this room a few times before us, and see how you feel: and we'll say whether you're wonderful, or exhibitionist, or whatever it is.

CLARENCE: No. I shall go and take them right off.

MARY: Stick to your guns, young Aesthete.

IDA: Stick to your trousers, anyhow. No, I mean it quite fairly. Walk up and down a few times past the sink. Yes:—there!

CLARENCE *walks. Enter JOE.*

MABEL (*irritably*): Hello, Joe! How're you feeling, hm?

INDIAN: Fine!

MABEL: Can you stay help wash dishes? Put some water in the kettle.

JOE *crosses in front of CLARENCE, who is walking up and down.*

CLARENCE: Excuse me, Joe, will you keep still a minute.

MABEL. I *told* him to fill the kettle.

CLARENCE: Mabel, I ~~am~~ acting at the request of the majority.

MABEL: You're a pure exhibitionist. I don't care about majorities, anyhow. Leave off exhibiting yourself.

IDA: Oh, but you're *fine*, Clarence! I'm *all* for rose-coloured trousers.

CLARENCE: I shall go and take them right off.

IDA: No! No! They're wonderful.

MARY: Let us appeal to true, unspoiled taste, and hear what the vital American has got to say. Joe, what do you think of his trousers?

INDIAN: Fine!

Enter TONY.

MABEL: Here's Tony! Let's ask Tony. He sees both sides. Tony, Clarence is going to the Plaza in those trousers. What you think of it?

TONY (*seating himself at table*): Make a guy of himself, sure.

MARY: You wouldn't go down to the Plaza in them, Tony?

TONY: Me? No. I wouldn't.

MARY: And you, Joe; would you go to the Plaza in those trousers?

INDIAN: No Mam! They're fine for a dance, for an Indian.

MABEL: That's it! You give them to Joe, Clarence.

CLARENCE: I shall not, Mabel. But I shall go and take them *right* off, and never put them on again.

IDA: Don't, Clarence! Oh, don't!

MARY: The Indian has spoken.

IDA: Then let the Jew speak. I'm a Jew, and my people are good at speaking. Clarence, I implore you, don't haul down your flag.

Keep your trousers. I'll walk down to the Plaza with you.

MABEL: *Ida!* Prepare for the consequences.

IDA: What consequences, Mabel?

MABEL: All the *talk*. What'll Andrew say?

IDA: Why I'll have him paint a portrait of Clarence *in* the trousers.

SPUD: Keep them, Clarence.

MRS SPRAGUE: They're a lovely colour; they make a bright note.

MARY: I wash my hands of them.

MABEL: But it's so *babyish*!

CLARENCE: I shall take them *right* off!

Flounces out. A silence.

MRS SPRAGUE: You know, voices have told me that Clarence is a great Initiator.

MABEL: Initiator of *what*, Alice?

IDA: The fashion in rose-coloured trousers. I agree *with* him entirely.

MRS SPRAGUE: No. If we take care of him, and protect him, and *love* him, he may be a Great Teacher.

MABEL: Well, I protect him, preventing him making a guy of himself.

MARY: I think the Indians are *always* right. I doubt if any young man is capable of having a revelation. I doubt *really* if any *man* is capable of having a revelation. Next time I *really* believe it will be a *Woman*. The next Redeemer will probably, almost certainly, be a *Woman*.

MABEL: Meaning yourself, Mary? Why shouldn't *I* have the revelation?

MARY: You're not perfect, Mabel. I'm glad you're not, for I have hardly any place in my life for a woman who is both rich and perfect.

MABEL: Tony!

TONY: What?

MABEL: Like a fried egg?

TONY: Yes, I think so.

MABEL: Well, get up and fry it then. There's no cook to-day.

MARY: How are you this morning, Tony? It's so good to sit next you.

TONY: I'm fine.

MABEL: The Indians *do* feel fine. They always feel fine. That's because they live right. They've got something that white people haven't got. We've got to get it. That's what we're here for. That's what I married Tony for: to try and get that wonderful

something that they've got and that white people haven't.
TONY (*Getting up at last and looking around vaguely*): Where the eggs?

MABEL: Can't you find any? Well, maybe there aren't any. Have some marmalade.

TONY: Well, I guess I eat a can of sardines.

MABEL: Tony, you don't want a can of sardines for breakfast!

TONY: Guess I do!

MABEL: Oh, dee-ar!

TONY *unwinds sardines*.

MARY: Mabel, when you say the Indians have that wonderful thing that white people haven't got, I think *I* have it.—Joe, more wood on the fire.—The Indians have the rhythm of the earth. The earth in America has a *special* rhythm, the marvellous American rhythm. And here in Taos that rhythm is at its height.

IDA: You mean altitude?

MARY: I mean the *perfect* rhythm. The white people still haven't got the rhythm of America, the perfect rhythm, of American earth. The Indians have had it so long, maybe they're in danger of losing it. The new revelation will come when the white people, when some white Woman gets the perfect rhythm of the American earth. And I think if I stay here all summer (*looks meaningly at Mabel*), I shall get it.

MABEL: Well, *stay* all the summer, and let's see you get it. We want something to happen. Here we all are, a group of more or less remarkable people, in a remarkable place, at a remarkable altitude. If something doesn't happen of itself, let's *make* it happen. Let's make a Thing!

Enter ELIZABETH, eating an apple and shedding large tears.

What's the matter, Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH: Why I'm so mad at Contentos.

MABEL: What's he done, then?

ELIZABETH: Why he's broken his bridle *again*, and got away.

MABEL: Where is he?

TONY: I tell you to take a rope——

MABEL: Go get a rope and catch him.

Enter CLARENCE in grey flannels.

IDA: Oh, dear, the glory has departed.

CLARENCE: Yes, it intended to depart.

IDA Too bad

MABEL Spud, you finished? Go get the poppies before the sun spoils them Hurry, now

SPUD Well, let me drink my coffee first

Drinks hurriedly and departs

IDA Spud's queer this morning

CLARENCE Spud always seems queer, to me

MABEL Spud is queer—I wonder what it is, whether we can't fix it

MRS SPRAGUE He has such a swell disposition I wonder what it can be?

CLARENCE I don't know Of course it mayn't mean anything, but I heard his door banging *all* night last night It really seemed mysterious

MRS SPRAGUE It was my door There's no catch on it It makes me nervous in the night

IDA Oh! Why doesn't Mabel have a catch *put* on the door? Of course it makes you nervous, banging in the wind

MABEL I forget about it, every day

CLARENCE I'll put a catch on the door

I exit

IDA Will he do it do you think?

MABEL Who, Clarence? Maybe But he's more likely to try a safety pin

IDA Mabel, you can say the Indians feel fine *all the time*, and that we ought to feel the same, but what I want to know is what do you mean by feeling fine? Feeling up to the mark and so on?

MABEL Oh no, none of those dreary things I mean feeling good You have that good feeling, don't you know, when you expand—and you make everybody around you feel wonderful I know I *do* it myself You can't help it—they've *got* to feel good, just because of the thing that's in you You radiate life, and the people around you feel good Haven't you seen me do it? Don't you feel it come from me?

IDA Ye-es maybe I do But what does this feeling good mean? Is it just good spirits?

MABEL No! Not any of that Tony, you explain how the Indians feel when they feel good

TONY (*chewing a sardine*) Well, the Indians, they feel the sun

They feel the sun inside them, and they feel good. Like what the sun inside them, and they love everybody.

IDA: Sunshine, Tony, or moonshine inside them?

MARY (*heavily*): Let me explain what it is. The sun is overhead, and the earth is underfoot. We live between the two——

At that moment, the telephone rings; SPUD enters with poppies, ELIZABETH behind him. MABEL jumps to the telephone; SPUD poses with poppies; ELIZABETH gets a cup and pours herself coffee. All speak at once.

MABEL: Hello!

ELIZABETH: Guess I'll have a cup of coffee.

SPUD: Aren't the poppies beautiful!

MABEL (*at telephone*): You, Ida! (*IDA goes to the telephone.*)

Elizabeth, you drinking coffee? Leave off! It's not good for you.

Go get some vases for the poppies.

ELIZABETH: Why, I can drink just a cup!

Exit ELIZABETH and SPUD.

IDA (*from phone*): Telegram from Andrew.

MABEL: What saying? (*IDA hangs up receiver and holds her head in both hands.*)

CURTAIN

SCENE II

Another room in the house.

ELIZABETH: Spud, why don't you come and ride with me now?

SPUD: Why, I don't know, Elizabeth. I guess I'm busy.

ELIZABETH: Oh, busy! What at?

SPUD: I don't know.—Write a *pome*.

ELIZABETH: A pome! Why don't you do that after dinner?

SPUD: I might not feel like it.

ELIZABETH: Well, why do it at all?

SPUD: Oh, I don't know. Why do anything?

ELIZABETH: Because it's fun! Let's go riding up the Canyon. Yes, do. It'll be lots of fun. Won't you?

SPUD I'm awfully sorry about Ida I mean I don't want to hurt her feelings But the very word marriage does something to me
Marriage! Marriage! Marriage!

ELIZABETH Marriage!

IDA Marriage! Perhaps you're right, Spud But we were always brought up to think it the most desirable thing on earth

ELIZABETH Oh I don't think that Only I *do* want some fun while I'm young, Spud

SPUD Well, I don't I always avoid fun, if I can

IDA And you don't want *love*, Spud?

SPUD Lo-o-ve! God, no! I'd rather take castor oil

ELIZABETH Love! L-o-o-ve! Much you know about it -

IDA Well, I hope you don't know much more, child

ELIZABETH I don't know anything at all, but it might be fun! Lots of fun

IDA Yes, it might What a pity it so rarely is

SPUD There you are, Ida You only want me to touch pitch because you've touched it

IDA Maybe it's because I'm a woman But what *do* you want, Spud?

SPUD I'll tell you I don't know myself

ELIZABETH He's only a don't-wanter, he is All he wants is to act mean, that's all he wants He's worse than Contentos

IDA Well, we all have our own difficulties

ELIZABETH I should say we do!

MABEL (*suddenly through door*) Oh dear! What are you all doing? Where are those vases?

ELIZABETH *drops vase*

ELIZABETH There goes one of them

CURTAIN

Noah's Flood: a fragment

CHARACTERS

NOAH

SHIM (the Utterer) I am, it is.

KANAH (the Echoer) it was, it shall be.

HAM (Heat)

SHELAH (flux)

JAPHLE (encompassing, spreading, Father of All :

also Destroyer)

COSBY (female-male. Kulturträger)

1ST MAN What ails the sun, that his mornings are so sickly?

2ND MAN You heard what the Old One said the sun is dark with the anger of the skies

1ST MAN The Old One is sly Himself is angry, so he says the anger breathes from the hollows of the sky We are not fools altogether What think you? Are the sons of men more stupid than the sons of God?

3RD MAN I don't think! The Old One and his demi-god sons, what are they? They're taller than the sons of men, but they are slower They are stronger, but it seems to me they are duller Ask women what they think of the sons of Noah, the demi-gods! Ah, the sons of God! They follow at the heels of the daughters of men, and the daughters of men laugh beneath the black beards, as they laugh when the bull snorts, and they are on the safe side of the wall Big is the bull by the river, but a boy leads him by the nose So, if you ask me, do we lead these big ones these demi-gods, old Noah and his sons, Shem and Ham and Japhet

1ST MAN If we had the secret of the red flutterer!

3RD MAN Ha! I have the name of that Bird Ham told a woman that the name is Fire

1ST MAN Fire! It is a poor name What is its father, and who its mother?

3RD MAN Nay, that Ham did not tell It is a secret of these demi-gods But I tell you It comes out of an egg And the Old One knows where the eggs of that bird called Fire are laid So he gathers them up, for his house

2ND MAN He shall tell us

3RD MAN No, he will never tell us But his sons may Because if we knew the secret of the red bird they call Fire, and could find the eggs and have the young ones flutter in our houses, then we should be greater than Noah and his sons The sons of men already are wittier than the sons of God If we had the scarlet chicken they call Fire, between our hands, we could do away with the sons of God, and have the world for our own

1ST MAN So it should be The sons of men are numberless, but these sons of God are few and slow The sons of men know the

secret of all things, save that of the red flutterer The sons of men are the makers of everything The sons of God command and chide, but what can they make, with their slow hands? Why are they lords, save that they guard the red bird which should now be ours What name do they give it, again?

3RD MAN Fire

1ST MAN Fire! Fire! And that is all their secret and their power merely Fire! Already we know their secret

3RD MAN Ham told it to a woman, and even as she lay with him she laughed beneath his beard, and mocked him

1ST MAN Yet this red bird hatches the pale dough into bread, into good dark bread Let us swear to catch the red bird, and take it to our houses And when it has laid its eggs, we will kill the demi-gods, and have the earth to ourselves For the sons of men must be free

2ND MAN Yes, indeed! Free! Free! Is it not a greater word than Fire? We will kill the demi-gods and be free But first we must catch the red bird, take him alive, in a snare

1ST MAN Ah, if we could! For Ham has told us that the feathers shine like feathers of the sun, with warmth, even hotter than the sun at noon

2ND MAN Then it were very good if we had him, seeing the sun in heaven has lost his best feathers, and limps dustily across the heavens like a moulting hen Ah men, have you learnt what it is to shiver?

3RD MAN Have we not! Even in the day-time shivers seize us, since the sun has moulted his rays And shivering in the day-time is like dying before one's hour The death-shiver is on us We must capture the red bird, so that he flutters his wings in our houses and brightens our flesh, as the moulting sun used to do, till he fell poor and mean

2ND MAN You know what Shem says? He says there are three birds the little red bird in the houses of the demi-gods——

3RD MAN The one Ham calls Fire We must lay hold of that one

2ND MAN Then the bigger bird of the sun, that beats his yellow wings and makes us warm, and makes the ferns unroll, and the fern-seed fall brown, for bread

3RD MAN Ah, the bird of the sun! But he is moulting, and has lost his ray-feathers and limps through grey dust across the sky He is

not to be depended on Let us once get hold of the red chick Ham calls Fire, and we will forget the sick sun of heaven We need our sun in our grasp A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush

2ND MAN Yet you know what Shem says Far, far away beyond the yellow sun that flies across the sky every day, taking the red berries to his nest, there lives the Great White Bird, that no man has ever seen

3RD MAN Nor no demi-god either

2ND MAN In the middle of the tree of darkness is a nest, and in the nest sits the Great White Bird And when he rises on his nest and beats his wings, a glow of strength goes through the world And the stars are the small white birds that have their nests among the outer leaves And our yellow sun is a young one that does but fly across from the eastern bough to the western, near us, each day, and in his flight stirs with his feathers the blue dust of space, so we see him in the blue of heaven, flashing his sun-pinions But beyond the blue fume of the sky, all the time, beyond our seeing, the Great White Bird roosts at the centre of the tree

3RD MAN Hast thou seen thy Great White Bird, fool?

2ND MAN: I? No!

3RD MAN When dost thou expect to see him?

2ND MAN I? Never!

3RD MAN Then why dost thou talk of him?

2ND MAN Because Shem told me

3RD MAN Shem! He is fooling thee Did he tell thee the secret of the little red bird?

2ND MAN That, no!

3RD MAN That, no! Rather will he tell thee of a Great White Duck that no man ever did see or ever will see Art thou not a fool?

2ND MAN Nay, for listen! Shem says that even the yellow sun cannot fly across from the eastern bough to the western, save on the wind of the wings of the Great White Bird On the dead air he cannot make heading Likewise, Shem says, the air men breathe is dead air, dead in the breast, save it is stirred fresh from the wings of the Great White Bird

3RD MAN The air in my breast is not dead

2ND MAN And so it is, the sun struggles in grey dust across the

answer no more, neither to gods nor demi-gods, sun nor inner sun

1ST MAN Men, masters of fire, and free on the face of the earth
Free from the need to answer, masters of the question Lo, when
we are lords of the question, how humbly the rest shall answer
Even the stars shall bow humbly, and yield us their reply, and
the sun shall no more have a will of his own

2ND MAN Can we do it?

1ST MAN Can we not! We are the sons of men, heirs and successors
of the sons of God Japhet said to me The sons of men cannot
capture the gift of fire for it is a gift Till it is given to them,
by the sons of God, they cannot have it—I said to him Give us
the gift—He said Nay! for ye know not how to ask When ye
know how to ask, it shall be given you

3RD MAN So! What they will not give, we will take

2ND MAN Yes, we will take it, in spite of them We are heirs of
the gods and the sons of God We are heirs of all Let us take
the flutterer and be free We have the right to everything, so let
us take

1ST MAN Japhet said it is a gift!

Enter NOAH

[Unfinished]

decoyed into their net Did Japhet ever talk of a Great White Bird? And Japhet is shrewd Japhet says Ah, you sons of men, your life is a predicament You live between warm and cold, take care If you fall into great heat, you are lost, if you slip down the crevices-of cold, you are gone for ever If the waters forsake you, you are vanished, and if the waters come down on you, you are swept away You cannot ride on the heat nor live beneath the waters The place you walk on is narrow as a plank across a torrent You must live on the banks of the stream, for if the stream dries up, you die, but if the stream flows over its banks, likewise you die Yet of the stream you ask not whence it cometh nor whither it goeth It travels for ever past you, it is always going, so you say The stream is there! I tell you, watch lest it be not there Watch lest the banks be gone beneath the flood For the waters run past you like wolves which are on the scent And waters come down on you like flocks of grasshoppers from the sky, alighting from the invisible But what are the wolves running for, and what hatched the flying waters in mid-heaven? You know not You ask not Yet your life is a travelling thread of water for ever passing Ask then, and it shall be answered you Know the whither and the whence, and not a wolf shall slip silently by in the night, without your consent Ask and it shall be answered unto you Ask! Ask! and all things shall be answered unto you, as the cock answers the sun Oh, wonderful race of Askers, there shall be no answer ye shall not wing out of the depths And who answers, serves—So says Japhet and says well And if we had the red flutterer, it should answer to us and all things after should answer to us for their existence And we should be the invincible, the Askers, those that set the questions

3RD MAN It is so If we had the red bird in our hand, we could force the sun to give himself up in answer, yea, even the Great White Bird would answer in obedience So we could unleash the waters from the ice, and shake the drops from the sky in answer to our demand The demi-gods are dumb askers, they get half-answers from us all What we want is the red bird

1ST MAN It is true That is all we need

2ND MAN Then let us take it Let us steal it from their house and be free

3RD MAN It is the great woid let us be free Let us yield ou

WESSON I consider I owe you, of money you had, about eleven pounds I'll be stingy and keep one of them Here's ten out of the forty we'd got

BARBARA I shan't have them

WESSON You can't go without any money

BARBARA Yes, I can

WESSON No, you can't If you don't have these ten pounds, I'll post them to Frederick to you

BARBARA Alright

WESSON (*feeling in his pocket*) Well, have ten lire, at any rate

BARBARA No, I won't have anything

WESSON You ought to be murdered for your obstinacy

BARBARA Not twice in one night

WESSON Very well, then—I will come with you down the village, since you're frightened of the men

BARBARA You needn't—I'm not frightened

WESSON No—you're too damned high and mighty to possess a single one of the human virtues or vices, you are! (*A silence*) Do you want to go, really?

BARBARA Yes

WESSON Liar!—Liar!—you are showing off! (*Snatches the hand-bag and flings it into the kitchen*) Fool's idiotic theatrical game Take that hat off

BARBARA You're giving your orders

WESSON Alright (*Seizes the hat, flings it through the door*)

BARBARA (*flashing*) What are you doing?

WESSON Stopping you being a fool Take your coat off

BARBARA I shall take my coat off when I please Indeed, you needn't show off, for the minute I want to walk out of this house I shall walk out, and you nor anybody else will prevent me

WESSON (*taking up his position with his back to the door*) Alright —you want to walk out now, and see!

BARBARA If I want to——

WESSON Want to, then——

BARBARA (*with a laugh of scorn*) Ha—you stop me! (*Marches up to him with her breast high He stands immovable*) Come out! (*He shakes his head*) Come out!

WESSON I told you I wouldn't

BARBARA Won't you?

Walsall's ha've only to say to one of you, Come, and he cometh, Go, and he goeth, Lie down and be kicked, and he lieth down and he is kicked—and serve him 'jolly well right

VOICE Ay—an' what about it? Tha's got a behind o' thy own, hasn't ter?

WILLIE Do you stand there and ask me what about it, and haven't the sense to alter it? Couldn't you set up a proper Government to-morrow, if you liked? Couldn't you contrive that the pits belonged to you, instead of you belonging to the pits, like so many old pit-ponies that stop down till they are blind, and take to eating coal-slack for meadow-grass, not knowing the difference? If only you'd learn to think, I'd respect you. As you are, I can't, not if I try my hardest. All you can think of is to ask for another shilling a day. That's as far as your imagination carries you. And perhaps you get sevenpence ha'penny, but pay for it with half a crown's worth of sweat. [The masters aren't fools—as you are. They'll give you two-thirds of what you ask for, but they'll get five-thirds of it back again—and they'll get it out of your flesh and blood, too, in jolly hard work. Shylock wasn't in it with them. He only wanted a pound of flesh. But you cheerfully give up a pound a week, each one of you, and keep on giving it up—But you don't seem to see these things. You can't think beyond your dinners and your 'lowance. You think if you can get another shilling a day you're set up. You make me tired, I tell you.]

JOB ARTHUR FREER We think of others besides ourselves

WILLIE Hello, Job Arthur—are you there? I didn't recognise you without your frock-coat and silk hat—on the Sabbath—What was that you said? You think of something else, besides yourselves?—Oh ay—I'm glad to hear it. Did you mean your own importance?

A motor car, GERALD BARLOW driving, OLIVER TURTON with him, has pulled up

JOB ARTHUR (*glancing at the car*) No, I didn't

WILLIE Didn't you, though?—Come, speak up, let us have it. The more the merrier. You were going to say something

JOB ARTHUR Nay, you were doing the talking

WILLIE Yes, so I was, till you interrupted, with a great idea on the tip of your tongue. Come, spit it out. No matter if Mr Barlow

to bear investigation, my friend Ah, but for your good and friendly intentions—

OLIVER You might have been alright?

ANABEL No, no, I don't mean that But we were a vicious triangle, Oliver—you must admit it

OLIVER You mean my friendship with Gerald went against you?

ANABEL Yes And your friendship with me went against Gerald

OLIVER So I am the devil in the piece

ANABEL You see, Oliver, Gerald loved you far too well ever to love me altogether He loved us both But the Gerald that loved you so dearly, old, old friends as you were, and *trusted* you, he turned a terrible face of contempt on me You don't know, Oliver, the cold edge of Gerald's contempt for me—because he was so secure and strong in his old friendship with you You don't know his sneering attitude to me in the deepest things—because he shared the deepest things with you He had a passion for me But he loved you

OLIVER Well, he doesn't any more We went apart after you had gone The friendship has become almost casual

ANABEL You see how bitterly you speak

OLIVER Yet you didn't hate me, Anabel

ANABEL No, Oliver—I was *awfully* fond of you I trusted you—and I trust you still You see I knew how fond Gerald was of you And I had to respect this feeling So I *had* to be aware of you I *had* to be conscious of you in a way, I had to love you You understand how I mean? Not with the same fearful love with which I loved Gerald You seemed to me warm and protecting—like a brother, you know—but a brother one *loves*

OLIVER And then you hated me?

ANABEL Yes, I had to hate you

OLIVER And you hated Gerald?

ANABEL Almost to madness—almost to madness

OLIVER Then you went away with that Norwegian What of him?

ANABEL What of him? Well, he's dead

OLIVER Ah! That's why you came back?

ANABEL No, no I came back because my only hope in life was in coming back Baard was beautiful—and awful You know how
✓ glisteringly blond he was Oliver, have you ever watched the

OLIVER All our lives would be better, if we hadn't to hang on in the perpetual tug-of-war, like two donkeys pulling at one carrot. The ghastly tension of possessions, and struggling for possession, spoils life for everybody.

MR BARLOW Yes, I know now, as I knew then, that it was wrong. But how to avoid the wrong? If I gave away the whole of my income, it would merely be an arbitrary dispensation of charity. The money would still be mine to give, and those that received it would probably only be weakened instead of strengthened. And then my wife was accustomed to a certain way of living, a certain establishment. Had I any right to sacrifice her, without her consent?

ANABEL Why, no!

MR BARLOW Again, if I withdrew from the Company, if I retired on a small income, I knew that another man would automatically take my place, and make it probably harder for the men.

ANABEL Of course—while the system stands, if one makes self-sacrifice one only panders to the system, makes it fatter.

MR BARLOW One panders to the system—one panders to the system. And so, you see, the problem is too much. One man cannot alter or affect the system, he can only sacrifice himself to it. Which is the worst thing probably that he can do.

OLIVER Quite. But why feel guilty for the system?—everybody supports it, the poor as much as the rich. If every rich man withdrew from the system, the working classes and socialists would keep it going, every man in the hope of getting rich himself at last. It's the people that are wrong. They want the system much more than the rich do—because they are much more anxious to be rich—never having been rich, poor devils.

MR BARLOW Just the system. So I decided at last that the best way was to give every private help that lay in my power. I would help my men individually and personally, wherever I could. Not one of them came to me and went away unheard, and there was no distress which could be alleviated that I did not try to alleviate. Yet I am afraid that the greatest distress I never heard of, the most distressed never came to me. They hid their trouble.

ANABEL Yes, the decent ones.

MR BARLOW But I wished to help—it was my duty. Still, I think

you? You will still let them trample in our private rooms, will you? Bah! I ought to leave you to your own devices

Exit MRS BARLOW

GERALD When you've done that, William, ask Mr Freer to come down here

WILLIAM Yes, sir

A pause Exit WILLIAM

GERALD So—o—o You've had another glimpse of the family life

ANABEL Yes Rather—disturbing

GERALD Not at all, when you're used to it Mother isn't as mad as she pretends to be

ANABEL I don't think she's mad at all I think she has most desperate courage

GERALD "Courage" is good That's a new term for it

ANABEL Yes, courage When a man says "courage" he means the courage to die A woman means the courage to live That's what women hate men most for, that they haven't the courage to live

GERALD Mother takes her courage into both hands rather late

ANABEL We're a little late ourselves

GERALD We are, rather By the way, you seem to have had plenty of the courage of death—you've played a pretty deathly game, it seems to me—both when I knew you and afterwards, you've had your finger pretty deep in the death-pie

ANABEL That's why I want a change of—of—

GERALD Of heart?—Better take Mother's tip, and try the poker

ANABEL I will

GERALD Ha—corraggio!

ANABEL Yes—corraggio!

GERALD Corraggiaccio!

ANABEL Corraggione!

GERALD Cock-a-doodle-doo!

Enter OLIVER and FREER

Oh, come in Don't be afraid, it's a charade (*ANABEL rises*) No, don't go, Anabel Corraggio! Take a seat, Mr Freer
JOE ARTHUR Sounds like a sneezing game, doesn't it?
GERALD It is Do you know the famous rhyme

*Speak roughly to your little boy,
And beat him when he sneezes'*

GERALD Why not, Anabel?

ANABEL Because you don't love me—and I can't forget

GERALD I do love you—and to-night I've forgotten

ANABEL Then make me forget, too Make me happy

GERALD I *can't* make you—and you know it

ANABEL Yes, you can It's your business to make me happy I've made you happy

GERALD You want to make me unhappy

ANABEL I *do* think you're the last word in selfishness If I say I can't forget, you merely say, "*I've forgotten*", and if I say I'm unhappy, all *you* can answer is that I want to make *you* unhappy I don't in the least I want to be happy myself But you don't help me

GERALD There is no help for it, you see If you *were* happy with me here you'd be happy As you aren't, nothing will make you—not genuinely

ANABEL And that's all you care

GERALD No—I wish we could both be happy at the same moment But apparently we can't

ANABEL And why not?—Because you're selfish and think of nothing but yourself and your own feelings

GERALD If it is so, it is so

ANABEL Then we shall never be happy

GERALD Then we shan't (*A pause*)

ANABEL Then what are we going to do?

GERALD Do?

ANABEL Do you want me to be with you?

GERALD Yes

ANABEL Are you sure?

GERALD Yes

ANABEL Then why don't you want me to be happy?

GERALD If you'd only *be* happy, here and now——

ANABEL How can I?

GERALD How can't you?—You've got a devil inside you

ANABEL Then make me not have a *devil*

GERALD I've known you long enough—and known myself long enough—to know I can make you nothing at all, Anabel neither can you make me If the happiness isn't there—well, we shall have to wait for it, like a dispensation It probably means we

you're looking for an egg—Tell us what you propose doing
Remove an obstacle from the way! What obstacle? And whose
way?

JOB ARTHUR I think it's pretty plain what the obstacle is

WILLIE Oh ay Tell us then

JOB ARTHUR The obstacle to Labour is Capital

WILLIE And how are we going to put salt on Capital's tail?

JOB ARTHUR By Labour we mean us working men, and by Capital
we mean those that derive benefit from us, take the cream off us
and leave us the skim

WILLIE Oh yes

JOB ARTHUR So that, if you're going to remove the obstacle, you've
got to remove the masters, and all that belongs to them Does
everybody agree with me?

VOICES (*loud*) Ah, we do—yes—we do that—we do an' a'—yi—
yi—that's it!

WILLIE Agreed unanimously But how are we going to do it? Do
you propose to send for Williamson's furniture van, to pack them
in? I should think one pantechnicon would do, just for this parish
I'll drive Who'll be the vanmen to lift and carry?

JOB ARTHUR It's no use fooling You've fooled for thirty years, and
we're no further What's got to be done will have to be begun
It's for every man to sweep in front of his own doorstep You
can't call your neighbours dirty till you've washed your own face
Every parish has got its own vermin, and it's the business of every
parish to get rid of its own

VOICES That's it—that's it—that's the ticket—that's the style!

WILLIE And are you going to comb 'em out, or do you propose to
use Keating's?

VOICES Shut it! Shut it up! Stop thy face! Hold thy gab!—Go on,
Job Arthur

JOB ARTHUR How it's got to be done is for us all to decide I'm not
one for violence, except it's a force-put But it's like this We've
been travelling for years to where we stand now—and here the
road stops There's only room for one at a time on this path
There's a precipice below and a rock-face above And in front of
us stand the masters Now there's three things we can do We
can either throw ourselves over the precipice, or we can lie
down and let the masters walk over us, or we can *get on*

The Merry-go-Round

A PLAY IN FIVE ACTS

(1912)

they canna ma'e Him out But I'll warrant He knows His own business, as I do

NURSE Oh, Mrs Hemstock

MRS HEMSTOCK Yes, an' I want my bed makin', 'dunnâ I? Shout our Harry Harry! Harry!

After a moment, HARRY enters a man of moderate stature, rather strongly built dark hair, heavy, dark moustache, pale, rather hollow cheeks, dangerous-looking brown eyes A certain furious shrinking from contact makes him seem young, in spite of a hangdog, heavy slouch

HARRY (to his mother—in broad dialect) What's want?

MRS HEMSTOCK I s'd think it is "What's want" an' I hanna set eyes on thee for pretty nigh a week Tha'll happen come to lie thyself, my lad, an' then tha can think o' me hours an' hours by mysen

HARRY What's want?

MRS HEMSTOCK An' why art paddlin' about in thy stockin' feet for? Tha 'asna gumption enough ter put thy slippers on, if ter's been i' th' garden Nurse, gi' me a drop o' brandy (*She lies back exhausted NURSE administers*)

NURSE Your mother wants lifting onto the couch, Mr Hemstock (*He comes forward*) Perhaps you will wash your hands in this water, will you—(*He obeys sullenly*)

MRS HEMSTOCK Tha'd better wesh 'em for 'im, Nurse, 'e's nowt but a baby 'As 'er catched thee yet? (*He does not answer*) 'E dursna go round th' corner, Nurse, for fear of a bogey—durst ter, eh? 'E's scared to death of a wench, so 'e goes about wi' a goose

A goose comes paddling into the room and wanders up to

HARRY

NURSE Hullo, Patty! You dear old silly

MRS HEMSTOCK Dost like 'er, Nurse?

NURSE She's a dear old thing

MRS HEMSTOCK Then tha'll like him He's just the same soft, canna say a word, thinks a mighty lot of himself, an's scared to death o' nowt

NURSE Oh, Mrs Hemstock!

MRS HEMSTOCK I canna abide a sawney

NURSE Are you ready, Mr Hemstock?

DR FOULES (*bowing*) Nor your wit, Nurse *Suum cuique* You have not——?

NURSE What?

DR FOULES You have not—married?

NURSE Nurse Broadbanks

DR FOULES Of course—ha ha—how slow of me *Verbum sat sapienti*

NURSE And you——?

DR FOULES What, Nurse?

NURSE Married?

DR FOULES No, Nurse, I am not Nor, if it is anything to your satisfaction, likely to be

NURSE Your mother is still alive?

DR FOULES (*bowing*) *Rem acu tetigisti* "You have pricked the point with your needle"

NURSE I beg your pardon

DR FOULES Do not, I beg, do not

NURSE *Semper idem*—I know so much Latin

DR FOULES In what am I always the same, Nurse?

NURSE Well—your politeness

DR FOULES *Suaviter in modo, fortiter in re* My old motto, you remember

NURSE I do not know the English for it

DR FOULES "Gentle in manner, resolute in deed"

NURSE In what deed, may I ask, Doctor?

DR FOULES You may ask, Nurse I am afraid I cannot tell you And I, may I ask what you have done?

NURSE Worked enough to be rather tired, Doctor—and found the world full of friends

DR FOULES *Non multa sed multum* "Not many things, but much," Nurse I could not say so much

NURSE (*laughing*) No?

DR FOULES *Quid rides?* "Wherefore do you laugh?"

NURSE She lives with you here?

DR FOULES My mother? Yes

NURSE It will always be said of you—"He was a good son"

DR FOULES I hope so, Nurse

NURSE Yes—it is the best

DR FOULES (*softly*) You look sad

RACHEL No—I mun only cry when I'm by myself (*Sobs*) I'm sure I'm sobbing half the night (*She cries*) Do you sleep bad? You do get up early—I can see your candle at half-past three and you don't know how it frightens me

HARRY What's it frighten thee for?

RACHEL I don't know I feel frightened, for you seem so funny nowadays

HARRY 'As ter on'y just foun' it out?

RACHEL You know I've told you about it many a time

HARRY A sight too often

RACHEL You are horrid What have I done? Tell me

HARRY I'm non goin' to be made shift of Tha'rt non goin' ter ma'e a spitton of me, ter spit the taste of somebody else out of thy mouth into

RACHEL Well, if I've been hateful, you've drove me to it—haven't you?

HARRY I've told thee, I dunna want thee

RACHEL An' I went into service, so's I'd have something to do—
an' so's I should be near—when——

HARRY Go on—an' so's—an' so's an' so's—I'm thy spitton, tha can spit owt inter me

RACHEL You're right, you're full o' sawdust

HARRY (*showing his teeth*) What?

RACHEL Sawdust, like a dummy You've no more life in you

HARRY (*in a passion*) What! What!

RACHEL Sawdust

HARRY (*springing and seizing her by the shoulders*) I'll settle thee!

RACHEL You've been drinking

HARRY (*shouting*) I'll settle thee, if I hang for it!

RACHEL You're hurting me!

HARRY (*quietly*) Come here. (*He binds her in her large shawl*)

RACHEL Oh! What are you doing?

HARRY I'll ha'e thee now, I will (*He seats her in the big arm-chair, strapping her with a leather belt he takes from his waist*)

RACHEL (*quietly*) Have you gone mad?

HARRY Now then—answer me! Did ter court Bill Naylor a' the time as thou wert goin' wi' me?

RACHEL No

HARRY (*his fist close to her eyes—loudly*) Trewth!

MR HEMSTOCK, (*entering*) Is he badly?

NURSE I think he'll be fairly by to-morrow

MR HEMSTOCK Tha'rt cading him a bit, Nurse

NURSE It is what will do him good—to be spoiled a while

MR HEMSTOCK 'Appen so—but it'll be a wonder

NURSE Why?

MR HEMSTOCK Spoilin' is spoilin', Nurse, especially for a man

NURSE Oh, I don't know How is Mrs Hemstock?

MR HEMSTOCK Funny I canna ma'e heads or tails of her

CURTAIN

BARON Nurse, I am a soldier

NURSE You are, Baron

BARON I must reward that—fellow—, although——

NURSE It is good of you, Baron

BARONESS And you called yourself a failure, Rudolf ?

BARON I can—I must speak for him at the colliery There I still have some influence

NURSE It is so good of you

BARON He has suffered already for his opposition It is not good for the enemies of God to prosper But I will write to my nephew

NURSE I could leave a letter, Baron—I am going past the colliery

BARON I will write now—then my honour is free (*Sits himself at the desk*) “My dear Nephew, I am placed under an obligation to that man of whom I have spoken to you before, Henry Hemstock, of the cottage at the end of the glebe close It is within the bounds of your generosity to relieve me of this burden of gratitude contracted to one of such order You will, of your fullness of spirit, lap over the confine of my debt with bounty Your Aunt salutes you, and I reach you my right hand Rudolf von Ruge”
—The manager of the collieries is as my own son to me, Nurse

BARONESS And he is a good son He is my nephew

NURSE I will leave the letter

CURTAIN

SCENE II

Evening of the same day NURSE'S room, the sitting-room of a miner's cottage comfortable, warm, pleasant NURSE in the armchair on one side of the fire MR WILCOX on the other He is a stout, elderly miner, with grey round whiskers and a face like a spaniel

MR WILCOX No, Nurse, I've not a bit of comfort

NURSE Why shouldn't Rachel stay and look after you?

MR WILCOX Nay, don't ask me—an ungrateful hussy And I can't seem to get a housekeeper as'll manage for me

ACT I V

*The evening after the last scene It is the third day of the play
The kitchen at the HEMSTOCKS'*

NURSE And what about the fire in the room?

SUSY I'll let it go out and take the ashes up by daylight It's falling dusk, an' I don't like being in by myself

NURSE Poor Mrs Hemstock—she went away quickly at the last

SUSY (*red-eyed—sniffing*) She did that Eh, but wan't she wasted?

A fair skeleton! I'm glad you laid her out, Nurse

NURSE I shall miss her I've been coming here over a year now

SUSY I hope I don't lie like that She used to be as strong as a horse But she was hard, you know

NURSE Perhaps she had enough to make her

SUSY She had—wi' my father an' the lads She was easiest wi' our Harry He was always mother's lad

NURSE Yet they have been so indifferent—

SUSY At the bottom they haven't She never forgave him for going with Rachel Wilcox—an' he was always funny-tempered, would rool up like a pea-bug, at a word

NURSE I thought she favoured Rachel Wilcox

SUSY No, hated her, but she used her to make game of him

NURSE She is engaged to the Baker now

SUSY Yes He's only having her for her money—an' she'll hate him when she's rubbed the fur off a bit But she's one would fuss round a pair of breeches on a clothesline, rather than have no man

NURSE I don't like her

SUSY Not many does She fair pines for our Harry, yet she'd have Job Arthur for fear of getting nobdy

NURSE How dreadful! (*She goes for her cloak*)

SUSY Nay, dunna go Stop an' ha'e a cup o' tea I durstn't stop in by mysen The kettle'll boil in a minute (*She lays the table*)

NURSE I really ought to go

ACT V

SCENE I

The Sunday following the last scene The porch of Grunston Church The HEMSTOCKS have attended the post-funeral service Mourners are leaving the church

1ST MOURNER Well, I niver knowed the likes——

2ND MOURNER What?

1ST MOURNER Nurse Broadbanks to be axed wi' old Hezekiah Wilcox, an' Job Arthur Bowers wi' Rachel Wilcox

3RD MOURNER An' what about it?

1ST MOURNER Well, I never thought Nurse would have him an' everybody said Job Arthur would never marry now

2ND MOURNER I'm not surprised at neither of 'em

1ST MOURNER I was never more taken in in my life

Exit 1ST and 2ND MOURNERS

SUSY No

3RD MOURNER I don't call it decent—two sets of banns put up at a funeral Sunday They might ha' waited till next week

SUSY I'm going to see about this

3RD MOURNER Yes, th' old Baron wants telling, the old nuisance, for he's nothing else

Exit SUSY and 3RD MOURNER

4TH MOURNER (*sighing*) That did me good I'm sure I've fair cried my eyes up

5TH MOURNER You can't make out half the old Baron says, but he makes you feel funny

4TH MOURNER As if you'd got ghosts in your bowels An' when he said—what was it?

5TH MOURNER Was it Hezekiah Wilcox wi' Nurse Broadbanks?

4TH MOURNER Yes—fancy 'em both bein' there to hear it What a come-down for her

5TH MOURNER I dunno The old chap's tidy well off——

4TH MOURNER But he's mushy—he slavers like a slobbering spaniel——

BARON I do not like it, I will not

SUSY Then lump it

MR WILCOX I call it scandalous, going on like this

RACHEL Like it or lump it, Father, like it or lump it

DR FOULES You accept me, Nurse?

NURSE I do, Doctor (*He kisses her hand*)

BAKER You accept me, Susan?

SUSY This once, Job Arthur (*He kisses her cheek*)

RACHEL (*after a moment*) Come on here, Harry (*They kiss on the mouth*)

BARON Go away from here You shall not pollute my church

BARONESS It is disgraceful

MR WILCOX They want horsewhipping, every one of them

MR HEMSTOCK Well—I must say——

DR FOULES It's "As You Like It"

BAKER It's "As You Lump It", Hezekiah

CURTAIN

GERTIE David Thompson! A bacon sawyer! Ph!

NELLIE What a name! Not likely Mrs Grocock! (*She giggles*) Oh—
dear no, nothing short of Mrs Carooso

*She holds back the skirts of her long pinafore with one hand
and affects the Gibson bend*

MOTHER (*laughing heartily*) Caruso! Caruso! A great fat
fellow——

GERTIE Besides, a collier! I'm not going to wash stinking pit-
things

NELLIE You don't know what you'll do yet, my girl I never knew
such cheek! I should think you want somebody grand, you do

GERTIE I do that Somebody who'll say, "Yes, dear Oh yes, dear"
Certainly, certainly!"

She simpers across the room, then giggles

NELLIE You soft cat, you! But look here, Gert, you'll get paid out,
treating Bernard Hufton as you do

GERTIE (*suddenly irritated*) Oh, I can't abide him I always feel
as if I could smack his face He thinks himself slikey He always
makes my——

A head passes the narrow side window

Oh, glory! there's Mr Lambert I'm off!

*She draws back against the bookcase A man passes the
large window The door opens and he enters He is a man of
middling stature, a miner, black from the pit His shoulders
are pushed up because he is cold He has a bushy iron-grey
beard He takes from his pocket a tin bottle and a knotted
"snap" bag—his food bag of dirty calico—and puts them with
a bang on the table Then he drags his heavily-shod feet to the
door on right, he limps slightly, one leg being shorter than the
other He hangs up his coat and cap in the passage and comes
back into the living-room No one speaks He wears a grey-and-
black neckerchief and, being coatless, his black arms are bare
to the elbows, where end the loose dirty sleeves of his flannel
singlet The MOTHER rises and goes to the scullery, carrying
the heavy saucepan The man gets hold of the table and pulls
it nearer the fire, away from his daughter*

NELLIE Why can't you leave the table where it was! We don't
want it stuck on top of the fire

FATHER Ah dun, if you dunna

FATHER Count it (*He shuffles upstairs*)

The MOTHER counts the money, putting it in little piles, & checking it from two white papers. She leaves it on the table. ERNEST goes into the scullery to wash his hands and is heard talking to his sister, who is wiping the pots. A knock at the outer door.

ERNEST Good evening, Mr Barker

A VOICE Good evenin', Ernest

A miner enters, pale, short, but well-made. He has a hard-looking head with short black hair. He lays his cap on a chair.
Good evenin', Missis 'Asn't Carlin come? Mester upstairs?

MOTHER Yes, he'll be down in a minute. I don't expect Mr Carlin will be many minutes. Sit down, Mr Barker. How's that lad of yours?

BARKER Well, 'e seems to be goin' on nicely, thank yer. Dixon took th' splints off last wik.

MOTHER Oh, well, that's better. He'll be alright directly. I should think he doesn't want to go in the pit again.

BARKER 'E doesna. 'E says 'e shall go farmin' wi' Jakes, but I shanna let 'im. It's nowt o' a sort o' job, that.

MOTHER No, it isn't (*Lowering her voice*). And how's missis?

BARKER (*also lowering his voice*) Well, I don't know. I want ter get back as soon as I'n got a few groceries an' stuff in. I sent for Mrs Smalley afore I com'n out. An' I'm come an' forgot th' market bag.

MOTHER (*going into the scullery*) Have mine, have mine. Nay, I've got another (*Brings him a large carpet bag with leather handles*).

BARKER Thank yer, Missis. I can bring it back next wik. You sure you wanna want it?

Another knock. Enter another man, fair, pale, smiling, an inconsiderable man.

CARLIN Hgh! Tha's bested me then? Good evenin', Missis.

BARKER Yes, I'n bet thee.

Enter the FATHER. He has put on a turn-down collar and a black tie, and his black waistcoat is buttoned, but he wears no coat. The other men take off the large neckerchiefs, grey and white silk, in fine check, and show similar collars. The FATHER assumes a slight tone of superiority.

Guess what I've been doing

MAGGIE (*rising, dilating, reaching towards him*) I don't know, What?

ERNEST (*smiling*) Verses

MAGGIE (*putting out her hand to him, supplicating*) Give them to me!

ERNEST (*still smiling*) They're such piffle

MAGGIE (*betwixt supplication and command*) Give them to me

He hands her the little volume, and goes out to the scullery

She sits down and reads with absorption

He returns in a moment, his hands dripping with clear water, and, pulling forward the panchion from the corner, takes out the last piece of white dough, scrapes the little pieces together, and begins to work the mass into a flattish ball, passing it from hand to hand. Then he drops the dough into the dripping-pan, and leaves it standing on the hearth. When he rises and looks at her, she looks up at him swiftly, with wide, brown, glowing eyes, her lips parted. He stands a moment smiling down at her.

ERNEST Well, do you like them?

MAGGIE (*nodding several times, does not reply for a second*) Yes, I do

ERNEST They're not up to much, though

MAGGIE (*softly*) Why not?

ERNEST (*slightly crestfallen at her readiness to accept him again*)

Well, are they?

MAGGIE (*nodding again*) Yes, they are! What makes you say they're not? I think they're splendid

ERNEST (*smiling, gratified, but not thinking the same himself*)

Which do you like best?

MAGGIE (*softly and thoughtfully*) I don't know I think this is so lovely, this about the almond tree

ERNEST (*smiling*) And you under it

She laughs up at him a moment, splendidly

But that's not the best

MAGGIE (*looking at him expectantly*) No?

ERNEST That one, "A Life History", is the best

MAGGIE (*wondering*) Yes?

ERNEST (*smiling*) It is It means more Look how full of signifi-

a moment to watch him as he lugubriously picks up the worst loaf and eyes it over

ERNEST (*grinily*) It's black bread now, that they talk about. (*He sniffs the loaf*)

BEATRICE resumes her mad, interrupted laughter MAGGIE sits down on the sofa and laughs till the tears come

ERNEST taps the loaf with his finger

BEATRICE Are you trying to see if it's done, William? (*From naive irony she departs into laughter*)

ERNEST (*answers, his lugubrious soul struggling with laughter, the girls laughing the while*) No, I was listening if it sounded hollow Hark!

They listen Laughter

It sounds cindery I wonder how deep it goes (*In a spirit of curiosity, he rises and fetches a knife, and, pulling a newspaper over the hearth, begins to cut away the burnt crust The bread-charcoal falls freely on the paper He looks at the loaf*) By Jove, there is a lot! It's like a sort of fine coke

The girls laugh their final burst, and pant with exhaustion, their hands pressed in their sides

It's about done for, at any rate (*Puts it down and takes another brown loaf, taps it*) This is not so bad, really, is it? (*Sadly*) It sounds a bit desiccated, though Poor Ma! (*He laughs*) She'll say it's your fault, Mag

MAGGIE (*with astonished, incredulous laughter*) Me?

BEATRICE She will, Mag, she will! She'll say if you hadn't been here making a fuss of him——

MAGGIE (*still laughing*) I'd better go before she comes

BEATRICE You want to scrape that with the nutmeg-grater, Ernest Where is it? Here, give it me

She takes the loaf, and ERNEST goes out and returns with the grater She begins to grate the loaf

MAGGIE takes up the white "cake" and feels the pale side, tapping the bottom

MAGGIE (*with decision*) This isn't done It's no good cutting it off till it's all finished I may as well put it in again (*She feels the heat of the two shelves, and puts the loaf on the upper*)

ERNEST picks up the ruined loaf

ERNEST What will she say when she sees this?

better not keep it on any longer—Yet I used to be about the same myself I was born with too much sense for that sort of, slobber

GERTIE Yes, isn't it hateful? I often think, "Oh, get off with you!" I'm sure I should never be like Nellie—Isn't Ernest late? You'll have Mr Lambert in first

MOTHER (*bitterly*) He is late He must have gone every bit of the way

GERTIE Nay, I bet he's not—that

I here is silence a moment

The MOTHER remembers the bread

MOTHER (*turning round and looking in the panchion*) Well, there ought to be two more brown loaves What have they done with them, now? (*Turns over the loaves, and looks about*)

GERTIE (*laughing*) I should think they've gone and eaten them, between them

MOTHER That's very funny (*She rises, and is going to look round the room*)

There is a whistle outside

GERTIE (*turning her head sharply aside*) Oh, hang it! I'm not going—I'm not!

MOTHER Who is it? John?

GERTIE It is, and I'm not going

The whistle is heard again

He can shut up, 'cause I'm not going!

MOTHER (*smiling*) You'll have to just go and speak to him, if he's waiting for you

The whistle is heard louder

GERTIE Isn't it hateful! I don't care I'll tell him I was in bed I should be if my father wasn't at the "Ram"

MOTHER (*sighing*) Ay! But you may guess he's seen Nellie, and she's been saying something to him

GERTIE Well, she needn't, then!

The whistle goes again

GERTIE cannot resist the will of the other, especially as the

MOTHER bids her go She flings her hand, and turns with great impatience

He can shut up! What's he want to come at this time for? Oh, hang him!

th n she kisses him and gently releases him. He kisses her. She gently draws away, saying, very tenderly

MOTHER There!—Nellie will be coming in

ERNEST (after a pause) And you do understand, don't you, later?

MOTHER (with great gentleness, having decided not to torment him) Yes, I understand now (She bluffs him)

ERNEST takes her hand and strokes it a moment. Then he bends down and continues to unfasten his boots. It is very silent

I'm sure that hussy ought to be in—just look at the time!

ERNEST Ay, it's scandalous!

Here are in each of their voices traces of the recent anguish, which makes their speech utterly insignificant. Nevertheless, in thus speaking, each reassures the other that the moment of abnormal emotion and proximity is passed, and the usual position of careless intimacy is reassumed.

MOTHER (rising) I shall have to go and call her—a brazen baggage!

There is a rattle of the yard gate, and NELLIE runs in, blinking very much.

NELLIE (out of breath, but very casually) Hello, our Ernest, you home?

MOTHER Yes, miss, and been home long ago. I'll not have it, my lady, so you needn't think it. You're not going to be down there till this time of night! It's disgraceful. What will his mother say, do you think, when he walks in at past eleven?

NELLIE She can say what she likes. Besides, she'll be in bed.

MOTHER She'll hear him, for all that. I'd be ashamed of myself, that I would, standing out there slobbering till this time of night!

I don't know how anyone can be such a fool!

NELLIE (smiling) Perhaps not, my dear.

MOTHER (slightly stung) No, and I should be sorry. I don't know what he wants running up at this time of a night.

NELLIE Oh, Mother, don't go on again! We've heard it a dozen times.

MOTHER And you'll hear it two dozen.

ERNEST, having got off his shoes, begins to take off his collar and tie

NELLIE sits down in the arm-chair

NELLIE (dragging up the stool and beginning to unlace her boots)

MARY Lay the table, Ida

IDA For everybody?

Enter MRS SPRAGUE in white muslin She hovers, then sits at table and looks benignly at the stray bits of wood left there by

CLARENCE, who re-enters at this moment

CLARENCE Oh—er, Good morning! Good morning, Mrs Sprague, how did you sleep? Good morning, Ida!

IDA We're supposed to be laying the table

MRS SPRAGUE (*picks up a tumbler and wanders around with it*) Oh yes! Oh yes!

MABEL pops in through the dining-room door

MABEL Where's breakfast? Where's Emila? Who rang that bell?

CLARENCE I rang the bell, Mabel I thought we might as well all know that cook isn't coming—Won't you go back to bed? Please do! You'll be so much more comfortable

MABEL (*rushing at stove*) Where's the coffee? Where's the coffee-pot? Is that water boiling?

MARY Mabel, I am making the coffee

MABEL It's got to boil It's got to boil several minutes I want it strong, so it's got to boil

MARY Mabel, you may trust many things to me, the least of them being the coffee Won't you all sit down and discuss the situation, while I solve it?

MABEL The bacon! (*rushes into pantry and emerges with a side of bacon*) Who can cut bacon thin? It's got to be cut thin I want it dry Cut it, somebody, and I'll cook it

CLARENCE (*with dignity*) I'll cut it, Mabel Where is a knife?

MABEL rushes across and produces a huge knife CLARENCE proceeds to saw bacon, on the table-cloth

IDA Not on the table-cloth, Clarence

MABEL (*snatching knife*) Not so thick! Somebody cut the bacon who can cut it thin (*Silence*) Spud, come and cut the bacon

SPUD (*reluctantly*) I'll try My God, be careful with that knife, you look like a Chicago aesthetic (*Crouches on floor to cut bacon*)

Enter INDIAN

INDIAN (*in doorway*) Hello!

MABEL Hello, Joe! No cook this morning You know how to cook?

IDA: Why won't you?

SPUD: Because I *don't want to*.

IDA: But there must be a reason why you don't want to.

SPUD: Why? Does everything have a reason?

IDA: Yes. How not?

SPUD: Well, I don't know the reason why I don't want to, if there is any reason beyond just not wanting to.

ELIZABETH: The reason is *meanness*.

IDA (*sighing*): I should have thought it would be awfully nice to ride up the canyon on a lovely summer morning with a fair and bonny maid—Love's young dream and all that sort of thing.

ELIZABETH: Ugh! *Ida!* For goodness' sake!

SPUD: That's exactly it. I don't want to fall in love with Elizabeth and possibly have her falling in love with me.

ELIZABETH: *Impossibly, not possibly, Spud don't want!* Till I want is to have *fun*.

SPUD: And every time you say it, I loathe *fun* more. I hate fun. I loathe it.

ELIZABETH: Well then, you must be just crazy. Everyone wants fun when they're young. It's only natural.

SPUD: Well then, I don't. Maybe I'm not young and natural.

ELIZABETH: You don't act young, so you can't be natural. A don't-wanter isn't natural.

IDA: But Spud, why shouldn't you fall in love with Elizabeth? She's a very nice girl.

ELIZABETH (*snorts*): Why sure!

IDA: Wouldn't it be awfully good for you to fall in love with her? Wouldn't it mean much more life for you?

SPUD: No!!! It wouldn't! I tell you I'm not going to fall in love with a *girl*, and go dangling around. I object to it all.

IDA: But suppose you couldn't help yourself?

ELIZABETH: Yea-a! What then?

SPUD: But I can help myself—and I intend to help myself. I'm not going to fall in love with some fool girl, and get *married*. Married! Ugh! The very thought of it makes me sick with myself.

ELIZABETH: Ida's been married twice; and she's married now, and her husband's coming here to stay. Nice sort of manners you've got, Spud Johnson.